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FIREWORKS

THE MELODIC ROCK MAGAZINE

Issue 67 £4.99
Jan/Feb 2015

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THE BAND FEEL LIVELY AS THEY HEAD FOR EUROPE

A DECADENT CD
UDO return to the scene with a brand new album

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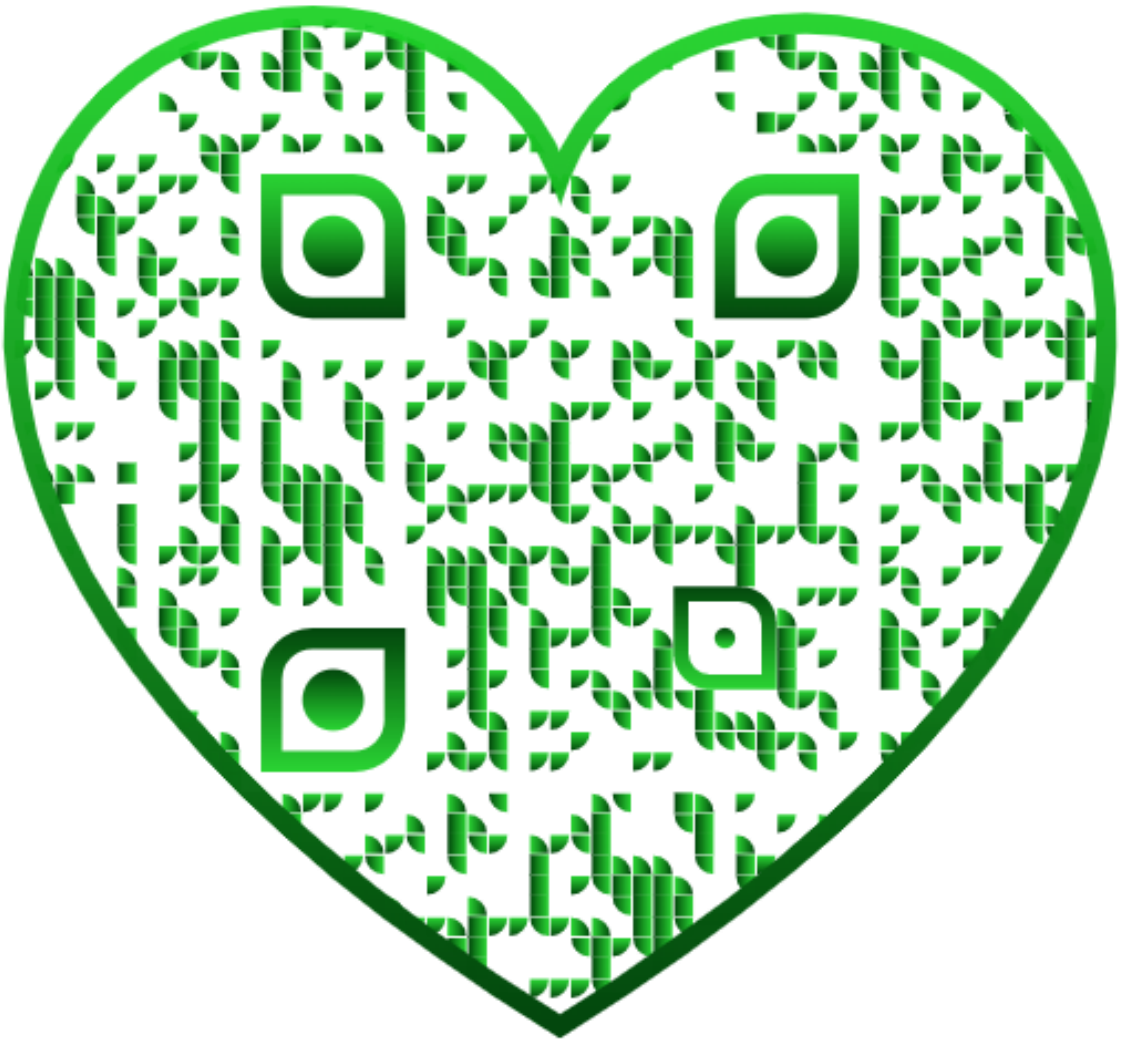

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EDITORIAL

Does anybody still go to the shops to do their Christmas shopping? The internet is a wonderful tool for finding gifts, although the Amazon 'recommendations' function is a very dangerous facility that severely hurts my bank balance.

As we usher in the Christmas season, we say goodbye for the last time to another annual event, the wonderful Firefest festival. For the first time ever, I got myself on stage for the finale and it was a really emotional moment. But I was also very proud, looking out over all the happy faces and knowing what we had achieved had given such a positive effect to so many people. Who knows what the future may bring, but for now let's just remember a wonderful 10 years with some of the best live music ever and the most professional crew to ever stand on stage!

Driving down to Nottingham on Firefest Thursday was another very emotional moment, when I heard on the radio that Alvin Stardust had died. My first live concert had been to see Alvin when I was about ten years old, and I still hold his glam rock anthems very close to my heart. Luckily I got to see him live again three years ago, and he still had it, even at 70! Alvin had just recorded his first new album in over 20 years and I was actually due to interview him for Fireworks, a life-time dream that sadly was never to be. The album, titled simply 'Alvin', was released on October 27th, and contains the work he considered the best of his career. I'll miss him.

On a brighter note, I'm happy to welcome back, for one issue only, our esteemed former reviews editor Paul Jerome Smith as he interviews Nightingale. Comically, I'd told current reviews editor Dave that Nightingale were one of Paul's favourite bands, and it would be a good idea to sweet talk him into doing the interview. Only I got my birds confused, and it was actually Skylark that were Paul's favourite. Luckily he loved the Nightingale album, so it all worked out well in the end. Cheers Paul!

Having doubled our print run after gaining distribution in USA and Canada, from next issue we've had to increase our advert prices. However, I still believe we offer amazing value for money and would like to take this opportunity to thank all those who have supported us in the past, and continue to do so in the future.

To end on, let me revisit the Christmas theme. The Ten double LP gatefold vinyl albums are now in stock and will make the perfect Xmas gift to those melodic rock loving relatives and friends, along with the CD version of the album and the amazing In Faith debut CD. Oh, and mugs …everyone needs mugs! All available at www.firefestofficial.com. All of us at Fireworks wish our readers a wonderful Christmas and a successful, happy 2015. See you in February!

Bruce

Interview with UDO DIRKSCHNEIDER by CARL BUXTON

Having interviewed Udo Dirkschneider for his previous album 'Steelhammer' last year, a real back to the roots recording that saw him reconnect with his past, it was good to catch up with the singer to see what has happened since then. We discussed the brand new album 'Decadent' set for release on January 23rd…

I got the album just before our interview but I've managed to listen to it twice…thoughts? It's very typical Germanic in its nature, very typically Heavy Metal in its musicality and it has an amazing mix of heavy 'crunchiness' and melody. I love this kind of Metal because I was a big Accept fan from my early teens.

When we put a new album out there is always a lot of interviews and I'm interested to hear what people think about the new album. So far, what can I say? Yes, look for the worst! (laughs)

Regarding the artwork, which has a lot of images depicted within the bald man in a suit and tie wearing shades and smoking a cigar, what can you tell me about its concept?

In a weird sense it is to show that we are living in a decadent world. When you look into his sunglasses there is a child with wide open eyes and underneath there is a hunger that means we are living in a decadent world. When you see the guy with a cigar and gold rings and necklace, there are little details on the cover artwork that depict this.

So what was the thinking behind the album title?

Of course the song 'Decadent' – the whole lyric, I find all this shit you know, that some people have so much money, on the other hand, kids are dying, they have nothing to eat… I mean I live on the island Ibiza where there are a lot of rich people who are having parties costing 150,000 euros a night and all that stuff. I think this is not right, you know? But in the beginning we hadn't planned to call the album 'Decadent', so then we have some lyrics in 'House Of Fake' about all the governments talking about "we are doing this and we are doing that and we'll make this better" and in the end they do nothing. And the song 'Pain' – the line goes 'How much pain can we take?' If you watch the news nowadays, you see massacres at American schools, suicide bombers, wars going on - all those things and the song is about these events. In a way all these things are decadent. So then we said "Okay, let's call the album 'Decadent'." Not a typical Heavy Metal title for the album as it's a little bit different but I think that it actually fits together. For me that's more important, instead of having 'Steel Attack' or 'Metal Attack' or 'Metal War' or whatever as the title for the album. I think for me that makes no sense this time.

I think the album title fits the band. I think it's quite a good title for U.D.O.

But we are not decadent! (laughs heartily)

No! Sorry, not in that way! It's a very strong word 'decadent' and U.D.O. is a very strong band.

Yes, it is a strong word. That is right, of course.

So give me some details on the recording process.

Our bass player Fitty Wienhold has lived on Ibiza for twenty years and so have I for the last six years. We have a studio called 'Double U' – it's a very relaxing atmosphere and we took our time with this album. Also now with two, newish, guitar players who are at the same level, one is the rhythm guitar player and one is the lead guitar player, it's interesting to work with them and find out how we can put these two guitar players together and how they work together; it was a very interesting process. So I think especially with the guitar work on the new album I'm really proud of these two guys. They did a very, very good job.

The album to me seems like a cross between mid-eighties Accept but with a very modern and relevant feel which I think is an extremely difficult thing to achieve – how do you view it?

I think in a way it's like a really traditional Heavy Metal album, on some parts back

to the old Accept thing, but it adds a lot of modern ideas in there. Let's put it this way, the guitar players are in a way really like the old classic Metal stuff but they play their stuff in the modern style and that also makes the whole thing very interesting for me.

With 'Mystery' - I'm trying to work it out whether it's you singing in two different ways or whether you have a guest vocalist which is a 'Welcome To My Nightmare' type of thing.

It's definitely me! (laughs)

So you're doing the Alice Cooper-type singing then?

I don't know, I mean I was never really a very big fan of Alice Cooper. That's interesting. You are actually the fifth or sixth guy who's said "Yeah this is like something that Alice Cooper was doing in the old days." Really? Maybe I was listening to some Alice Cooper CDs (laughs). I didn't notice that. You know on this album, the 'Mystery' are the 'devil walkers' the first trial of the night. And with the 'devil walkers' I wanted to do something crazy you know, I wanted to make it different, so when I did the main recording of the vocal we didn't get the same feeling, so we said "Okay, let's keep the favourite original demo vocal". Sometimes things happen like that.

Last year's 'Steelhammer' was written by yourself and Fitty, with Stefan Kaufmann stepping down but with the door left open. Has Stefan had any involvement with writing on this album or is it just yourself and Fitty again?

No. No. Stefan was not involved in 'Steelhammer' and he's also not involved in the new album. I'm still in contact with Stefan via e-mail, stuff like that, and I don't know exactly what he is doing at the moment, although we met each other two or three weeks ago – we talked with each other, having a beer, see what's going on, blah, blah, blah, but as things stand, the time for him being the producer of U.D.O. is over. We've found a different way [to record] but it's nothing against Stefan producing and stuff like that. Maybe he's coming up with a good song or whatever, I don't care, if it sounds good, I don't care who was writing the song, but as a producer, working with him in the studio I think that time is over. There were some problems - I was not really happy with the last two albums [that Stefan produced] 'Rev-Raptor' and 'Dominator' - good songs but I was not really happy with the production; stuff like that. But this is history! (laughs)

So who was responsible for the recording, mixing and mastering on this new album?

I was producing together with Mattes Pfeiffer, I was doing the production and mixing, Fitty Wienhold was co-producing, we were both responsible for guitar recording and a bit of arranging here and there and then Mattes together with Jacob Hansen (Amaranthe, Pretty Maids, Primal Fear, Volbeat) did the mastering. He's a very good guy, a really good guy.

So do any of the songs on the new album have a special meaning for you Udo?

Yes, of course, 'Secrets In Paradise' - in a way this is some private stuff about my wife, she left me after twenty-six years and fell in love with somebody else, and definitely the song 'Decadent', the lyrics I like very much.

My particular favourite song at the moment is 'Untouchable'. It's just a fantastic Metal anthem that German bands do so well. Why do you think that Germans are so good at doing Metal anthems?

(Laughs) Why are you asking me? I don't know…It just comes natural, you know? I cannot really explain it. Maybe we have some breeding for stuff like that you? I know that a lot of German bands tend to do stuff like that. Maybe it's a German trade-mark? (laughs)

I AM GIANT

Interview by Dave Boot

I Am Giant may be an unfamiliar name to many readers of Fireworks (they certainly had me trawling the internet for more info) but the quality of the sophomore 'Science And Survival' release led me to pinning down bass player Paul Matthews for a brief chat. He gave me some background about the band and brought me up to date about the creation of the new album.

We formed around six years ago. Shelton (Woolright, drums) and I moved to the UK from New Zealand where we had been in well-established bands. We moved to the UK to be in a bigger musical environment and we spent about a year looking for a vocalist before we found Ed Martin. Our first album 'The Horrifying Truth' came out in 2011, and we have toured all over the globe in support of it including opening for Slash in Australia, playing some huge festivals including some DC Shoes and Quiksilver sponsored events as they have been supporting I Am Giant since before our first record. The better part of 2013 was spent working on and recording our follow up 'Science And Survival' which is out this year and due for a late October release in the UK.

My review of the album (very positive I must say) references several artists as comparisons but what are the influences of everyone in the band and do you think these influences are reflected in the songs on the new album?

I think influences always shine through. We're lovers of music so there's been a lot of influence. On 'Science And Survival' I was wanting to make something that was like a Pink Floyd record and create a musical journey. Shelton was really vibing on 90s grunge and alternative, so quite Soundgarden, from him. Ed was coming from more of a Radiohead vibe. There's always a little Deftones and Faith No More in there too.

As the bio mentions, at times the music is hard-hitting but there are many reflective passages that include some great melodies. It's a style that is quite difficult to categorize but do you see that as a good thing?

Well as long as we're writing stuff that we think is exciting and other people hear it and think it's exciting and make a connection with what we're writing about, we don't mind not being pigeon holed. If not being easily sorted into a genre were to stop us from being played on any radio stations... which no doubt it has done in some countries... then so be it. We have to be who we are, for better or worse and write what's coming naturally as a unit.

With that in mind, closing track 'Bought With Ignorance, Sold With Arrogance' is something of an epic, clocking in at thirteen minutes, and at times borders on Progressive due to the changes in tempo. Did you go into the writing process with a song of that complexity in mind or did it just come naturally as the writing progressed?

No we planned it from the start. I think the call was to have a really epic last track to close the record and to have something that summarises the moods, themes and attitude of the rest of the songs. We spent a long time on it and worked to make sure that it was a journey worth taking. We had people saying no one would listen to a twelve minute song but we beg to differ. There are people who have the attention span and attention to detail who are hanging out for something that isn't just a three minute hook fest.

The first two singles, 'Razor Wire Reality' and 'Death Of You', have a great commercial edge so how well have they been received so far, or is it too soon to tell?

Too early to tell I think but we have noticed people singing them at shows so that's a good sign.

Do you think the album is a natural progression from 'The Horrifying Truth'? If so, how do you think the band's sound has evolved?

I think it is a natural evolution for sure. It's a heavier, more progressive album than the first. We've settled into our sound a lot more and we were happy pushing it a lot more on this one.

How does the writing process usually take shape?

I usually start out with a load of musical ideas, riffs and so on and then Shelton and I will work on the ones we're both feeling, record the music and send it to Ed who will put some vocal lines to it. I'll then write the lyrics, we'll arrange and keep refining the ideas till it's all working together and then we'll record and mix a demo of the track.

I'm guessing you'll be including as much of the new material in the live set as possible, with it being so strong?

Absolutely and also it's awesome playing some new tunes live to say the least. We've played the old ones a lot.

So what does the rest of 2014 and 2015 have in store for I Am Giant? Is it just touring and promoting 'Science and Survival'?

That's it - in a load of places. Europe, New Zealand and Australia and 2015 I believe we'll be hitting the US and Japan. We'll keep working on ideas for album number three as well.

We're on tour at the end of October in the UK (Oct 30 Manchester, Kraak; Oct 31 Birmingham Oobleck; Nov 1 Nightmare Festival, London; Nov 5 Face Bar, Reading; Nov 6 Nottingham, Rock City; Nov 7 Cardiff, Moon Club) ticket links on our website!

Come say hi on facebook.com/iamgiantband if you haven't heard the tunes, Spotify us or head to our website www.iamgiant.com

Martin Barre

Martin Barre has earned the title legend. His guitar work with Jethro Tull incorporated Rock, Folk and Blues and helped the band sell over 60 million records worldwide and add to that, that he has worked with diverse artists such as Paul McCartney, Phil Collins and Gary Moore.

For the past four years Martin has forged ahead with his own band, playing Tull classics and Blues standards and has now released a new live in the studio album called 'Order Of Play'. Firework's Ray Paul finds out more.

Why release a live album now?

We really wanted to have a good representation of our live performances, fans had been asking us for one for some time.

I noticed there was no audience noise?

That's because it is not a "live" album, we recorded it in the studio! It is live, though not in the true sense of how you would perceive a live album, the reason being I wanted it to be the best quality, rather than just rush release a poor sounding live album to raise a bit of money. We set up the back line in the studio the day after a festival and played every number once and recorded it over two days, making sure we had a good clear sound.

Are you finding a new freedom as a guitarist, not having the restrictions you had in Jethro Tull?

Absolutely, I don't think I realised how little guitar I was playing in Jethro Tull, my role had been diminishing over the years. Ian was playing more and more flute to compensate for his voice and this left less room for my guitar work. Since forming my own band, I have such freedom as guitarist, and I am loving every minute.

Did you and Ian ever discuss his voice issues or your lack of guitar playing?

Not exactly. Going back fifteen years, I used to put together many of the set-lists for the Jethro Tull tours, which kept things fresh. In later years he became very confined musically due to the limitations in his voice, and the set-list was taken out of my hands. I felt the band became very musically stunted.

With the wealth of Tull material available will you be revamping the set-list?

To be honest I want to reduce the Tull songs and include a lot more original material We may still include odd songs and give them a more Blues Rock slant, though in the case of 'Teacher' it is such a great song anyway, that we don't need to do anything with it. We are working on a great version of the Howlin Wolf classic 'Smokestack Lightning', which I am very excited about adding to the ever expanding set list.

You put this band together four years ago, was there any temptation to use any ex members of Jethro Tull?

Not really. I had a great many friends as musicians anyway that I had played with, so I just contacted a few who I thought would be interested. In fact we have just changed the current line-up, adding Richard Beesley on saxophone, who has played with The Funk Brothers and The Supremes, while Alan Thomson on bass guitar has worked with Bo Diddley and Robert Palmer. Both are great musicians that I think will bring a lot to the table, musically.

You have really put a terrific new take on Tull classics 'Fatman' and 'A New Day Yesterday' on the new CD.

Thank you. Yes, we have injected them with a lot more Blues Rock guitar, which is what I enjoy playing. The songs are still recognisable but with a new slant.

Any chance of adding your new version of 'Pussy Willow' to the set, from your previous release 'Away With Words'?

That is such a great song. I will certainly take that thought on for future reference.

Considering your guitar work in 'Aqualung' is considered as classic, was there any temptation to add it to the set?

Not really. I think it would have been too obvious a choice and I feel it's a bit of a cheap shot. I don't want to rely too much on past glories, as I am trying to forge ahead, though I may change my mind in the future! (laughs)

Do you think 'Aqualung' being cited as the definitive Tull album does an injustice to other albums in the catalogue?

It was a prominent album for its time like 'Thick As A Brick' but not very enjoyable to make I am afraid, so I have bad memories. Ian was getting more and more frustrated with the audiences, especially in America; during the quieter moments people would all be shouting out and this would annoy Ian immensely. So my memories of that time may go against the public's perception of that release.

Do you tire of being asked about your position in Jethro Tull and if you going to work with Ian again?

Not really. I always give the same answer, my door is open, whereupon I think Ian's is now closed. The important thing is Ian and myself are both enjoying what we are doing and as some people have said we have two great bands instead of one now.

Are their plans for a new studio album Martin?

Yes indeed, in fact I have just written one song. I really don't enjoy writing lyrics, so I am happy to pass that over to Dan Crisp, my singer, and see what he can come up with. I am always open to suggestions with my writing so this will be a real band effort. We hope to have the album ready in the new year, for now we are concentrating on the new CD release and the up and coming tour.

When did you first start playing music?

At about eleven. My Mum and Dad both played, my mum had a single out in the Sixties that got to #1 in Holland; she was in a band called The Three Good Reasons, the song was called 'Nowhere Man'. We're a really musical family, it's something we've always done, but I started playing at eleven and joined a band at thirteen while at school. Then I started playing with cover bands and pub bands and did a couple of original bands, then settled down and got married and had kids, got a job and bought a suit! But I carried on playing until February of this year, that was my last gig with Contraband, my main three-piece covers band for the last fifteen years. I used to write with one of the original bands but never really got anything down; actually one of the tracks on the album is one I wrote twenty-odd years ago, the ballad 'Spend The Night'. But then I bought a guitar pedal in 2011 that came with a free copy of Cubase for recording on your PC, and started writing ideas and putting them down, and went from there. I sent one to Steve Price of Arfm who played it on his show, then Paul Nicholls of Firebrand Rock Radio saw the stuff I put on YouTube and contacted me to ask permission to play it, then somebody from America played it on a Rock Radio station. It was then suggested that I sent the stuff to some record companies because they were really good, so I got the e-mail address of Serafino at Frontiers and sent it to him with the belief that nothing would happen. Twenty minutes later I got a reply saying "Do you want to make an album?" I had four songs at the time so I had to start writing some more, then he introduced me to Alessandro Del Vecchio and we went from there. I went out to Milan and recorded the album in June 2012.

What was the experience of finally getting to record an album like?

It's something I've wanted to do since I was a kid, I've always wanted to be a musician and make my own album in a proper studio with real musicians. It's been a dream come true for me, I've loved every minute of it.

As the album was recorded in 2012, why did Frontiers decide to hold back the release?

After it was recorded, Alessandro and Serafino introduced me to Vinny Burns with the plan of writing something together and we hit it off like a house on fire. We wrote a few tunes and decided it should become a band. Frontiers decided to get the Three Lions album out first and then move on with my album from there. It was the right decision I guess, it's very difficult to launch a brand new name anywhere, but now hopefully there will be a few people who know who I am because of Three Lions, because the feedback we've had has been phenomenal. We've had some fantastic reviews, we've played out in Milan at the Frontiers festival, we've played with Snakecharmer, it's been great. We wouldn't change anything about the album, it's the sort of thing we like listening to,

After spending over twenty-five years playing in pub and tribute bands in his native Yorkshire, vocalist, bassist and guitarist Nigel Bailey stepped into the limelight when he joined up with former Ten and Dare members Vinny Burns and Greg Morgan to form Three Lions. Barely six months after the release of the trio's debut album comes the first solo release from Bailey, the hugely impressive 'Long Way Down'. Ant Heeks phoned Nigel to learn more about his background.

we weren't reinventing the wheel.

In comparison to Three Lions, the Bailey album is a little heavier. Would you say this was more of a representation of who you are as an artist?

Not really. You're right, there are heavier songs that are more Melodic Hard Rock as opposed to AOR. The one thing I must stress is that, like Three Lions, there was no agenda given to me by anybody as to what the album was to be. There's a good mix of songs on there, 'Somewhere In Oslo' was inspired by the Eagles West Coast/Country thing that I grew up listening to; my dad was a big Country fan, so I've got that influence in me. But I also like bands like Iron Maiden, Metallica, Amon Amarth, Avantasia, Dream Theater. I've got a huge range of influences and it's just the music I like which came to me at the time. I'd come up with an idea, be it a riff, a melody or some lyrics and write a song around that.

Is there any particular reason you decided to go with 'In The Name Of The King' as the first video?

We thought it was the best representation for the album, and it was different to Three Lions. Obviously there will be similarities with Three Lions because I wrote it with Vinny and Greg, but this just shows a different side of me. We discussed ideas for the video with the Director Emanuel Mathez. At the beginning there's a lovely shot of what looks like a really old book with the lyrics on the side, then he got somebody to come in and play the part of the crazy monk, which I admit I was a little sceptical of to begin with. The song is about a Norwegian Viking tale about a boy who is born and his destiny is to go and take back the kingdom that his forefathers lost. It's nothing to do with religion, but I did say right from the start there was no way on this earth they were going to make me stand there in fur with a sword! (laughs)

Are there any plans for touring?

At the moment, no. We've got irons in the fire, but I've got no management at the moment, which is proving quite difficult. We were hoping we would have more gigs and festivals with Three Lions next year but we're still waiting on answers from people and waiting for opportunities for both Three Lions and Bailey. The big problem is that Vinny still goes out with Dare, Ten are still out touring, so the last thing we want to do as Three Lions is go out and play Dare and Ten songs to fill out a set so we can do headline shows. Maybe an odd Dare or Ten song would be acceptable because Vinny and Greg were with them both, but it's not something they really want to do, so we're stuck with about forty-five minutes of music, which is not enough to headline, so we're reliant on trying to get some support slots.

Have you learnt anything new about the music industry since you started recording?

Yes, everything! Every preconception that I had is pretty much wrong. You hear that money is thrown at you left right and centre, it doesn't happen. You hear that every record company is horrible, yet Frontiers have been absolutely fantastic with me, I can't fault them at all. Serafino, Mario…Alessandro Del Vecchio is one of the nicest guys on the planet, they have been absolutely brilliant for both Bailey and Three Lions, they're trying to promote the music as best as they can. So yes, it's been a very sharp learning curve, don't believe everything you read, but it's as good as you think it's going to be and it's given me access to things I never thought I'd have; meeting some of my heroes in the last couple of years, I never dreamed it would happen. Overall, it's been fantastic, if you could turn your hobby into your job you'd do it tomorrow, and this is a hobby for me. I'm still a musician playing guitar and singing in a band, it's just on a slightly different scale. To go into a reputable studio and make an album is a dream come true, I'm sure that people who've made twenty or thirty albums, it becomes just another day at the office, but for me, I can't believe I've had this fantastic opportunity.

RUSSELL ALLEN & MAT SINNER

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JOHN TAGLIERI

Having jumped from band to band and instrument to instrument for many years, John Taglieri finally took his destiny into his own hands in 1999 when he not only released his first solo album, the aptly title 'Leap Of Faith', but also formed a record label and opened a recording studio. Having just released his twelfth solo offering, 'Days Like These', Steven Reid spoke to John to ask him exactly what makes a day like this, like these…

'Days Like These', your new EP, finds you returning to a Melodic Rock sound that you haven't fully explored since your 1999 debut album. Fifteen years down the line, why did you want to reinvestigate this style?

I never really went away, just explored a bit. I'm not a writer who writes specifically for one thing. I kinda write what comes. What is going on in my life, what music I'm into at that time, where I've been travelling, it all plays into what I write. There's always been melodic songs but sometimes I happened to venture out to other areas as well. It was always fun to see what would come out and I think I had some amazing songs through it all. For 'Days Like These' I went in with no preconceived notions and just wrote. I wrote alone and with some amazing friends and wanted to have fun. That was kind of the only caveat. I wanted to have fun and write some songs that moved me. I think I got exactly that and they happened to rock out a bit! I have to say also if you back-up a few CDs and check out 'TAG', you'll find a VERY AOR Rock album!

Fireworks readers will be very familiar with the names of Kenny Aronoff and Eric Ragno, who both, amongst other guests, played a big part in putting together 'Days Like These'. How did you manage to get these guys and the other guests onboard for this EP?

Eric Ragno and I grew up together! We hung with the same people and have stayed in touch. It was nice to finally just reach out and say lets work together! Lee Turner (Darius Rucker) has been playing keys with me for seven CDs now. As for Kenny Aronoff, he's been one of my idols since I first heard him when I was like, 13 years old! So I reached out to him on email and asked if he'd be interested in playing on the CD. To my surprise he said yes and a few days later we were on the phone chatting about it! It was GREAT working with him and he played an amazing track on the EP. Same with Rich Redmond as well, who plays with Jason Aldean, Kelly Clarkson and so many more. I also had some good friends… Chad Cunningham and Alan Bowers on drums. It was SO cool to sit back and look at the credits and see my name listed next to them! I've since gotten to meet Kenny and hang with him and he's a genuinely awesome person. We are definitely going to be doing more work in the future.

You released the EP 'Southern Paradise', where you explored a more Country style of Rock music. That's very popular at the moment, was there a temptation to simply continue down that musical path?

Not at all. That was an interesting release. It was the first release I didn't produce. It was handled by Sean Mormelo and Mark Cohn. They did an amazing job, but some of their Country flair definitely made its way onto the CD. Also, at the time I'd been listening to a lot of modern Country and that bled in through the writing as well. I'm actually very fond of that release and it did well. It was my first CD to hit Billboard, making it to #74 which was truly an amazing feeling.

Yes, both of your most recent EPs have achieved chart success. You must be delighted at the reaction to them?

That has been amazing. To be fifteen years and twelve releases into my career, and see that I can still make relevant music means the world to me. When we are kids and start out we all want to be like our idols…be on the charts. When 'Southern Paradise' hit Billboard, it was one of the proudest days of my career. 'Days Like These' came out and debuted at #29 which blew my mind.

Over the past couple of years there's been a huge increase in bands and artists putting out shorter, but more frequent releases. You certainly seem to have moved your focus in this direction. What's the thinking behind releasing EPs instead of albums?

I started that with 'Everything We Are' in 2008. I saw that iTunes and other digital mediums were on the rise and that people were starting to prefer singles over full CDs. I decided that I'd still put out twelve songs a year, but do it in two six-song batches every six months. It gave people smaller, easier to digest portions and it also helps to keep their attention versus releasing twelve songs once a year and then risking them forgetting about you. I think it's a smart model business wise these days. Writing in smaller batches almost ensures better songs instead of working hard for twelve winners every time. You record in smaller batches, which means faster sessions that generally cost less and can be more productive. And as I said, it helps to keep the fan-base engaged by giving them a steady stream of music. I've actually even contemplated releasing two EPs a year as well as some random singles. I don't see going back to full length CDs helping my career in any way. Being indie, on my own label, I don't have the pressure and big budgets that huge acts have and can be really nimble in my releases and game plans and can change on the fly if I think something is or isn't working. So while I wont say never, I don't see me doing it except for maybe a special release like I did for my 'Best Of'.

You play a lot of shows, all year round, do you perform in a band situation, or are most of them solo performances?

I'm playing almost exclusively solo these days. I had my band up until 2011 and then realised that I was killing myself to have it. Being solo, I'm freer to do the things I really want to without any issues. I still get to jam with some friend's bands, so I get my fill of being involved with big bombastic Rock shows…which I LOVE!!

And finally, what's next for you? More live shows, more EPs, more Melodic Rock, or something completely different?

2015 is shaping up to be killer. My calendar will probably be in the neighbourhood of 220 shows, Eric Ragno and I are talking about doing an EP together, I'll be doing another John Taglieri EP, and my band from twenty-five years ago, Big Trouble, is going to do an Anniversary CD with all the songs we never got to release! On top of that, I'm a new dad and that's got me hopping, and life is always throwing curveballs at me…which I love. So it's going to be a fun, but very busy year!

www.JohnTaglieri.com
www.facebook.com/JohnTaglieriMusic
www.ReverbNation.com/JohnTaglieri
www.Youtube.com/LeapDog

Photo: Anthony Mario P…

FYRE!

The debut album, 'Missy Powerful', from new Spanish based Hard Rock sensations FYRE! has just been ignited by Soulfood/AFM Records. With a band name like that, Fireworks simply had to find out more. Singer and guitarist Alejandra Burgos answered Brent Rusche's burning questions…

It certainly appears that you were destined for a career in music when your father handed you a guitar at a young age. What was the atmosphere in the house like when growing up? Was music always playing?

Yes, there was music playing all the time. I had been listening to my father playing guitar since I was 5 years old. My parents were not professional musicians, but they were always playing clubs and bars and my three sisters all play music as well, but not as professionals.

How long were you touring Europe before ultimately meeting Lars Ratz (bass), Tolo Grimalt (guitar) and Sergi Tomas (drums) forming what has become FYRE!?

I had been touring solo for six years, since 2008; basically with my own songs, just playing guitar and singing on hundreds of little club stages.

Your vocal style and delivery stands to be a unique blend of some of the best female singers in the canon of Rock and Popular music. I hear influences from Pat Benatar, Sandi Saraya, Joan Jett, Doro... even Faith Hill!

Thanks! I love Pat Benatar, Joan Jett, and Faith Hill; her song 'This Kiss' particularly. My strong influences are The Beatles, Elvis Presley, Melissa Etheridge, Janis Joplin, Big Mama Thornton, Ruth Brown, Bonnie Raitt, Blondie, Chris Cornell, and Bjork…

Who were some of the most profound influences on you as a musician and the decision to go in the direction of performing Hard Rock?

I'd have to say bands like Aerosmith, Lenny Kravitz, Foo Fighters, Kiss, Chris Cornell, Garbage…; those guys really influenced me to start performing in the direction of Hard Rock, even if I was coming from the more Bluesy side of it.

Once the band solidified, how long did it take to write, record and produce 'Missy Powerful?'

Well, we wrote twenty-five songs together in two and a half years. We also played more than twenty club shows in this time, as we really needed to find out if we could "feel" the songs live…. We recorded the album with Miguel Angel "Mega" Riutort, at Psychosomatic Studio in Mallorca, Spain - our home base is Spain; we all live on the island of Mallorca. We wanted as much as possible to have a live feeling to it; that's why we recorded the drums, bass and rhythm guitar at the same time. We did not use any overdubs on the rhythm section or computers to correct things; what you hear is 100% real just like in the old days. "Mega" also mixed the record as well. He does all our live sound, so he knows just how we want FYRE! to sound. The vocals were then recorded here in Ibiza; Lars and I went to MRC Studios for about three weeks and everything was done there. It was mastered at Hay Zeelen Mastering in Mallorca. The guy's really great; a bit of a hippie guy but with modern skills.

How did you come to sign with Soulfood / AFM Records?

Lars and I went to Germany with a guitar on my back and the CD in my pocket basically… We went to their offices and played them the songs and basically just asked for their opinions. In the end we had various ways to go but chose the one which looked the best for us. We decide everything like this on our own and this was important for us as artists.

Was the album completely finished before you signed?

Basically yes; we just did one or two final adjustments in the mix.

I'm certain that 'Missy Powerful' has already had, or will be receiving overwhelmingly positive reviews. What are your plans to capitalize on the momentum of this most excellent debut?

Let's see. If you don't expect anything big then you cannot be disappointed if it doesn't work out… So, we are really happy with everything that has happened already and now it's simple; let's see what will happen in the future.

The album sequence is executed really well. With the advent of purchasing music via digital download, where the customer now has the ability to pick and choose certain tracks, how much effort was given to the organization of the music as a cohesive unit rather than a collection of individual tracks?

Basically the album is a bit of a concept album where the single songs are connected to each other, but I think each song works as well on its own and this dictates the running order. If somebody really likes some of the single songs, when you hear it on a download for example, then he or she might want to hear the whole album anyway – we hope so.

Relationships seem to be a common theme in many of the songs. What other subject matter does the band find to provide a muse for new material?

Not all the songs are about relationships actually; for example, '27' is about all the great artists who have died by the age of 27, which is such a big loss for the musical world as they would have been giving us so much more great music. And 'Front Row Kids' is about the feeling of being 100% a fan; banging your head to your favourite music, in the front row for your favourite bands… The lyrics came mainly from Lars and describe his feelings when, 15 years old, he was standing in the first row at the "Monsters Of Rock" festival…, back in 1984…

Although you have clearly made a name for yourself performing in your native country of Argentina as well as traversing the European continent, what is your interest and ultimate goal with regards to penetrating the market in say, the United States?

Wow, the USA is far away at the moment, so for now we are taking it step by step and concentrating on Europe first. We're playing shows with Michael Schenker right now (in Spain), then we'll be back on the road again with Anastacia, in January. We're in London January 23rd, at the Shepherd's Bush Empire, so hope to see everyone there!

Paul Jerome Smith explores aspects of the unexpected but quite fabulous new album 'Retribution' with DAN SWANŐ, vocalist and mastermind behind the band NIGHTINGALE…

To begin with we discussed the stop:go history of the band, of which 'Retribution' is the seventh (eight if the limited 'Nightfall Overture' release is included) album of a near 20 year existence. Naturally, I enquired why now for a new Nightingale album, some seven years since 'White Darkness' was released and wondered what had provided the impetus for Dan to wish to resuscitate the band yet again.

"Well, after a few attempts of writing material for an album that could have been finished around 2008, I just felt that the material at hand (except 'Chasing The Storm Away') wasn't even good enough to fit as a bonus track on any of the other Nightingale records, so I just let it be. Once I started writing songs for the Witherscape album, I discovered a lot of riffs and ideas that were more suitable for Nightingale, and after I made a few demos, I felt that I had material powerful and strong and definitely good enough to be compared with our past work. My brother, however, felt that his material didn't work for him any more. I insisted that 'Chasing The Storm Away" must be on the album, and then I wrote some more stuff and around the autumn of 2011 I had enough material to seriously considering making another Nightingale album."

I mentioned to Dan that he is a busy guy and noted that his WITHERSCAPE project also has an imminent EP release. This and much of his other work could well have many of our readers running for cover, I suggested! However, I was pleased to establish that the music of Nightingale sits at the more mellow and totally melodic end of Dan's musical spectrum, and mentioned that in his review for Fireworks Magazine/ www.rocktopia.co.uk, Gary Marshall has described 'Retribution' as "a stunning Melodic Rock album" featuring "beautifully gritty but melodic vocals of the very highest order"…

"Wow! That is such an awesome thing to read from someone who reviews this style of music all the time! I know a lot of people connect me with Death Metal and stuff like that, but I have been performing Melodic Rock for a lot longer than I have been doing brutal stuff. And it wasn't easy being an AOR Fan in the Death Metal scene and vice versa, but I did my best to stick out, and even wore a 'Holidays in Eden' Marillion shirt when my Death Metal band was interviewed on Headbangers Ball!! I released super-melodic Post-Prog Unicorn between 1989 and 1995 and to my surprise, a lot of Death Metal fans totally loved those albums, and these days I find myself trading "Sadly forgotten AOR Jewels" with bands that I mix, that play really brutal stuff!"

I commented that all the music on the album is credited to him, excepting his brother Dag's 'Chasing…' that he had just mentioned. I wondered to what extent he had a clear vision of what he was trying to achieve with 'Retribution'…

"Well, I knew I wanted an album that was strong all the way through, and I wanted it to sound like a "classic" Nightingale album. Something the fans of 'Alive Again' would totally worship! And I was right. So far the reactions for the die hard fans have been amazing. Most of them honestly believe it is our best album, and it is so awesome to hear that I cannot even begin to describe it!"

Next, I ran past Dan an understanding that he has not always found writing song lyrics an easy process and on 'Retribution' fellow players Tom Björn and Erik Oskarsson have provided much of the (and it had to be said) quite magnificent lyrical input. However for me, I identified the song '27 (Curse Or Coincidence?)' - which is entirely from Dan's pen - as not only the pinnacle of achievement here, but also one of my top 5 songs of 2014 (in a very strong year). It's not just musically exquisite (with contrasting heavier and lighter sections), I suggested, but he had lyrically interwoven elements from the songs and/or deaths of at least three members of the "27 Club" (Morrison, Hendrix, Cobain) in an especially emotive and intricate way…

"Wow! Thanks, Paul! That's so incredibly cool to hear!! The first one in this story is actually Robert Johnson. They're all guitar players, and two of them lefties like me (Dan smiles…) and they all left their mark in music history. They all have their own section of the lyrics, and I studied their lives really carefully online and their life stories are all so sad, that it was actually pretty emotional to investigate their downfall. For the lines written for Jimi Hendrix, I tried to use as much of his song titles as possible, but put into sentences that made sense with the over all concept. Very time consuming, but worth the work once it worked out!!

"'Divided I Fall' is written about a

pair of conjoined twins that I read about somewhere. One of them was strong and the other one weak, with the weak one "feeding" off the life force from the strong one, and the parents had to choose between seeing them both die or separate them and let the weak one die. I wrote the lyrics from the view of the soul of the weak part. I actually shed a tear during the recording of the final part of this song, and it's the first time I ever did that.

"The lyrics for 'The Voyage Of Endurance' is about the true story about the explorer Ernest Shackleton and his crew that survived years stranded on the ice of Antarctica, while 'The Maze' is a blend of fact and fiction. It's about a super brilliant mathematician that finally gets lost in his own mind. There's just too much brilliance there and he just escapes into his own world, all in his mind."

Finally, I wanted to discuss the overall sound, having noted that Dan was also responsible for the mixing and the mastering of the album. I suggested that it really has wonderful sonics from beginning to end and manages to capture a sort of retro vibe and Classic Rock pomposity while also having a warm feel to the production thus also giving a sort of modern feel. So I asked him to share with me what he was trying to achieve and whether he felt he'd accomplished this…

"Again...thank you very much indeed for your comment! I spent a lot of time getting the vibe just right for the sonics of the album and it is so amazing to know that you picked up on the "sonic flavour" I created! You see, Nightingale have never really had a perfect production to me ears. 'Nightfall Overture' and 'White Darkness' sounded good and came close, but there were still things to improve. I paid attention to productions that "stood out" in my car stereo, stuff that just sounded better than the rest among my carefully chosen 1200 favourite song collection on my iPod and I made sure that my mix had the same "magic" as those tracks. And it wasn't easy… I spent a lot of time running up and down the stairs from the studio to my car only to go "nope, that' s not it!" and back up again (smiles) Luckily I didn't have many other things to do in the studio around the time I mixed the album, so I let it take its time and I checked the mix in anything from €1k in-ears to original iPod in-ears to €9 PC speakers to €2k studio monitors and everything in between. I can finally say that I feel I have found the perfect balance between a modern and a vintage sound, custom made for Nightingale!"

I closed the interview by asking Dan not to leave it so long before embarking on the next Nightingale album!

"Paul, I am really quite the Melodic Rock-o-phile so it's more than just a feature in a magazine for me! Hopefully the fans of Melodic Rock will check us out and not scared off from my involvement with more brutal stuff!"

[The much fuller version of the interview with Dan, plus comments on their lyrics from Tom Björn and Erik Oskarsson will be found at www.rocktopia.co.uk]

NIGHTINGALE'S DISCOGRAPHY
(source: Janne Stark)

THE BREATHING SHADOW
(1995: Black Mark BMCD66)

THE CLOSING CHRONICLES
(1996: Black Mark BMCD90)

I
(2000: Black Mark BMCD135)

ALIVE AGAIN
(2002: Black Mark BMCD165)

INVISIBLE
(2004: Black Mark BMCD172)

NIGHTFALL OVERTURE
(2005: Black Mark BMCD184)*

WHITE DARKNESS
(2007: Black Mark BMDP187)

RETRIBUTION
(2014: Inside Out 0506872)

** very limited edition of 500 for sale on tour of Germany and The Netherlands*

Flyleaf's new album 'Between The Stars' is something of a departure from the more aggressive edge of previous albums. With a new vocalist in tow and a different more Pop orientated approach, Mike Newdeck caught up with bassist Pat Seals to find out the reasons for the transformation on the new album.

Why did Lacey Sturm leave?

She wanted to pursue another life and that included having a baby. I don't really communicate with her anymore but other band members do. It was fairly amicable but I was still surprised when she left.

How did you feel at that point?

Well I had a lot of questions to answer; how would we continue? How would we tour and how would I deal with all the other crises related to it? At the same time I looked at it as an opportunity to move forward and develop. When Kristen joined it worked out and we realised the opportunity and it really couldn't be better.

How difficult was it to replace her and how did you manage to get Kristen, who had previously sung for Vedera?

Of course it was difficult but luckily our manager and lawyer were very good at finding us some singers to check out. We auditioned a few people and after about halfway through her first audition song we were thinking that it was probably going to be her. The people that we auditioned were unknown, having previously had minor success in the States.

What has Kristen given to the band?

Well she didn't just get the job because she was the best singer; we had a definite feeling about her and her personality. She brings light to the writing process and it's just brought a brighter, more positive light to the whole band. She wanted it all to work as much as we did and that's a great thing. She cares about the band and about her performance in the band particularly on stage and she has this way of connecting to people through the songs.

How does 'Between The Stars' differ from 'New Horizons'? Is this purely down to Kristen or were there other factors?

'New Horizons' was born in the midst of a storm. The songs were written and recorded as the band was breaking up and there's a tension there. This new album is more of reconciliation of Flyleaf and a bit of a rebirth. This album is more cohesive and the songs are way more danceable and the brightness that Kristen brings is there in the music too. There's a sense of freedom that wasn't there before and we all enjoyed making it.

How do you feel about being labeled a Pop Rock band now?

I'm not a massive fan of pigeon-holing any sort of music really but yeah, it's more commercial, but we didn't get round a table beforehand and decide to make it that way, it just happened and it felt natural.

Did you ever consider having a male replacement?

It did actually cross our minds, but it would have made it difficult to play our back catalogue live, and it is really our sound, our signature to have a female singer. It's in our DNA. Having a different lead singer was really enough to move forward but still be in touch with the past.

Was there any difference in the writing process for this album compared to the last one?

Yeah, because Kristen-May's spontaneity was a massive difference allowing us to generate some great songs in an afternoon. As far as song selection for the album, the label had a say, and of course the producer Don Gilmore had a say, and we listened to everyone until there was a clear consensus what would make the record.

Were you involved and at what level?

We're all involved in the songwriting but there's a different dynamic now that Kristen is involved, it's given everything a new edge but yeah, I still have a big input into the writing process.

Would you say that fans of old Flyleaf will take to this album?

I think they will but I also think they realise it isn't going to be a carbon copy of our previous material. I think they're open-minded enough to get it and generally our fans stick by us. The feeling this side of the Atlantic has been very positive and we've been doing well on Billboard on active rock and so it looks good. They've also been enjoying the new songs at the shows.

How did you get involved with Pledgemusic? Does an established band need to do it?

From the outside it wouldn't appear that we needed to do it like this but we'd come to a crossroads with our label and had to find the cash to make a new album. Luckily our fans are great and we knew enough people to come up with the money to carry on.

Is this the way forward in the music industry?

It's definitely the future, everyone is left more satisfied, the fans get what they want and the band get to make music; it's a great synergy. Despite the claim that Rock is dead, it really isn't – it's there but being managed differently. It's mutated and changing for everyone.

You worked with Don Gilmore on the new album and previously Howard Benson. Why the change?

We'd done three albums with Howard previously and it was time to freshen it up. Don wanted to do it and so we agreed. We had a few people in mind but he was the guy with more ideas and it seemed a good fit with some of the songs that we'd written. Don gave us a groove and a more dance orientated sound whereas Howard was more organized and less off the cuff. Both are great but different. To be honest I'd work with either again.

Can you recapture some of your success from your earlier career?

Perhaps we can but it's not our number one priority and I'm not looking at it like that. I'm happy that we got to do it and that people are getting to hear it. We're definitely not chasing commercial success.

What's the plan after the album release?

We're looking at coming over to Europe and playing some acoustic shows and that looks to be early next year. We haven't worked anything out yet but that's the intention. We want to get to the UK because they're so appreciative of the music. That was the impression we got when we played Download in 2009 and when we did a small tour shortly before.

Flyleaf's latest album 'Between The Stars' is out now on earMusic.

THE BIRTHDAY MASSACRE

The Birthday Massacre is a Female-Fronted six-piece from Ontario, Canada who formed back in 1999. They have a unique sound that includes many varied styles from Synth Pop to Gothic to Rock. They have so far released five albums and have now released their sixth entitled 'Superstition'. Dave Scott fired some question to their vocalist Chibi to delve deeper into the band and the new album.

How did you come up with such a memorable name?

Well, they're two opposites – Birthday and Massacre are obviously very different things and contrast one another. We have a lot of these sort of opposite pairings in our music and our imagery – creepy and cute, heavy and melodic. We enjoy putting opposites beside each other and finding ways to blend them together cohesively.

You have described TBM as an audio visual project; I have also read that you learned about "color theory" and that was responsible for your use of violet, what was your thought process and reason for that decision? Also, where does the rabbit connection come from?

Using purple and violet as the band's colours goes back to that contrast pairing – to get purple, you mix together red and blue – hot and cold. We've used consistent imagery throughout our artwork; fantasy silhouettes and landscapes all blending colours and pictures to create something that I think is very recognisable as being "us". And the rabbit was originally a transitional element on our website that led from page to page – sort of a "follow the rabbit" idea. It has taken on a life of its own and is again, very much a part of us.

I don't think I have ever described your music the same way to two people. How would you describe the TBM sound to someone new to the band?

Ha-ha, I don't really know how I'd categorise the music either! It's better for others to determine that for themselves, I think. We grew up in the 1980s, so there are definitely influences from the stuff we loved growing up; Synth Pop, Metal and Industrial. We listen to everything from Roxette to Pantera to Nine Inch Nails. Combining those sounds that appeal to us is what we do; make the sort of music we'd ideally like to listen to.

You have embraced the internet since you first started. How have you made it work for you?

We really have tried to use the internet as a means of growing the community around the band since we were able to. Obviously the internet has affected music sales and the industry is very different now, everyone knows that. So I'd say it is a wonderful tool for community and for interaction, for really putting yourself out there and finding what's going on with your audience.

Your new album 'Superstition' has just been released and you partly funded it through Pledgemusic. Why did you decide to go this route and how did you feel meeting the target so quickly?

We were hesitant to do it. We really wanted it to be worthwhile for the fans if we were going to try it out. We spent a lot of time thinking up things that we would want to see from bands we like. It was incredible to reach our goal so quickly; the campaign definitely brought to us an awareness of how supportive our fans can be. We're so grateful for everything they've done for us. Our fans really are wonderful, creative, supportive people and the campaign illustrated that for us so well.

How does the new album compare to your previous release 'Hide And Seek' and to your earlier work prior to that?

I won't really be able to tell you that until some time has passed and I can listen to it with a more objective, critical mind. I have heard feedback that it has a more 1980s sound than the last few recordings. Again, I'm really not sure. We don't go into a writing process with a goal of doing anything deliberately different to the sound. It just reflects where we are while we're recording.

When it comes to lyrics, where do you get your inspiration from?

It's all about where we are and what we are feeling at that point. For the last record, I was very interested in the concept of a city being alive, about true crime, mysteries, things that happen within a city that you don't know about; the current running beneath things. This time around, I was in a much darker place and sort of looking for spiritual comfort, which naturally just brings up confusion and even more questions, so there are more of those lyrical themes on this record. I suffered a few losses in the last year which sent me looking for comfort; a sort of "what is beyond all of this" kind of thing. We started looking at legends, religions, ideas, what other cultures look to, what images and ideas from those explorations appealed to us and working those themes in. Ultimately, spiritual and religious beliefs are basically just "superstitions", and thus, that became the theme of the album.

If you had to highlight one particular track, what would it be and why?

I can't! I can't pick one song, in another year or two I will be able to tell you which ones have stuck with me. We're on tour right now and we've been able to explore performing a bunch of the new songs live, which gives me a new perspective on them. 'Divide' is fun to play live, 'Superstition' has a really intense, creepy vibe and 'Beyond' is really pretty, Poppy and sad. Those are the ones I guess I'm most focused on right now.

You turned to Dave Ogilvie for production, what made you decide to work with him and what did he bring to the new album?

We have worked with Ogilvie for the last few albums we have done. He's a great producer and a good friend at this point. We trust him, he's definitely able to step in and tell us when something is done. We're perfectionists and would still likely be working on the album without him to give a listen and tell us what's needed and when to step away. It's essential to work with people you trust.

You are known for having a great relationship with your fans, obviously helped through the net which we discussed earlier. How has this contact helped you develop and what input has it allowed the fans to have with you as a band?

We are personally connected to many of our fans that we've known through the years, and we are always reading online to see what people are thinking and feeling about what we release and what we're up to. There is also a great relationship between our fans – they become like family to one another in a lot of ways. The internet facilitates this, obviously.

JIMMY BARNES

As the voice of Cold Chisel, as well as a hugely successful solo artist, Jimmy Barnes is an icon of the Australian music scene. Celebrating three decades as a solo artist, Barnes elected to call up some friends to give a fresh perspective to some of the key songs from his career to date. Entitled 'Hindsight', the album is an absolute winner and features a raft of big names, such as Neal Schon, Jonathan Cain, Joe Bonamassa and Little Steven, just to name a few. James Gaden spoke to the vocalist to hear more…

"I'm really thrilled with it," an exuberant Barnes exclaims. "It was a labour of love really. I got in there with Kevin Shirley and a bunch of mates and it all started falling into place. We had a great time making it and I think that shows in the record."

There can be no doubt that there is a real sense of fun about the record with Barnes sounding absolutely invigorated and revelling in the chance to perform with some of his favourite musicians.

"It was all really organic. The record company suggested I get a bunch of bands to do my songs. I didn't want to do that, if I'm gonna get a bunch of bands I like to do my songs, I wanna sing with them! The next move was I was actually in L.A. and Chris Cheney from The Living End was there. He's a good mate and we were out having dinner and I asked him if he wanted to do a song on my new record. He said 'Yeah! I want to do 'Lay Down Your Guns'!'. It was sort of a loaded question, I knew he'd pick that. Chris is a really big Brian Setzer fan and Brian played on the original. That was the way it went with a lot of people. There were one or two where I actually picked tunes for them to do: Shihad for example, I sent them 'Love And Hate' because I was dying to hear them play it. But most of the others, like Diesel, he's my brother in law, he lives next door and straight away he said he wanted to do 'I'd Die To Be With You Tonight'. He's played that song a million times with me and my band and when he played it, it sounded completely fresh."

"Fresh" is certainly a word that applies to the album, as this is one of the rare examples of re-recorded songs from an already loved back catalogue where every song is as good, if not better than the original. There isn't one song that hasn't benefitted.

"I think so too," Barnes agrees, "and I think that's one of the great things about the record. I think they were great songs anyway and these artists, my friends, have lived with and grown up with them. They've mucked about with them, jammed on them, they've sort of had a hand in how they went and it was very organic. We had a good idea of what we were going to do before we even started recording. It wasn't taking a bunch of half-baked song ideas and trying to polish them up, they were already really good songs and these guys brought more out of them. When you record a song that's totally new, you get there and you record it and three months later you hear the thing on the radio and think 'Damn, I wish I'd done this…' It was an opportunity to implement that as well."

For fans of Barnes like myself, the other major appeal was he hasn't just selected "the hits". The well known tracks are nestled alongside cuts from lesser known albums. Two are taken from the 'Love And Fear' record, one I personally believe to be Barnes' most underrated effort.

"I think so too, that was why I included 'Love And Hate'," a clearly pleased Barnes responds. "With 'Time Will Tell', I sent that to Suze DeMarchi of the Baby Animals, that was my choice for them. For me, that's one of my favourite songs. It's one of my theme songs. I had a period where I had done all the wrong things, I deserved a good belting, you know? My mates were all telling me I needed to take it on the chin, take it like a man, get back up and I'll be okay. But I was more along the lines of 'Fuck it, I won't lie down, I'm going to keep marching.' The opening line of the song is 'I will not lay down/With just a whimper'. That's basically my theme song and I wanted that to be the first song on the record. It's my mantra. The Baby Animals did a great job. Dave Leslie, their guitar player, was in my band for many years and Dario Bortolin, the bass player, was with me for ten years. They all know me really well and brought something special to it. Then when Suze DeMarchi opens her mouth, she brings something beautiful to a song. She added a real sass to it and I loved singing with her."

Somebody else Barnes enjoys singing with is former INXS vocalist Jon Stevens, now fronting The Dead Daisies and a reformed Noiseworks. Stevens and Barnes have sung together numerous times live but incredibly had never actually recorded together in a studio.

"Jon's been a mate of mine for many years and he's one of the great singers," Barnes acknowledges. "While I was doing the record, I realised I've never actually had the opportunity to get in the studio and record with Jon. I rang him up and asked if he wanted to sing a song and he said 'Anything you want mate, anything you want!' So 'I'd Rather Be Blind' was that song. It was taken from the 'Heat' record and that's another song, I think it was a jewel that got lost on there. I think between my voice and Jon's we've helped that song shine."

Aside from recruiting friends, family put in an appearance as well, Barnes' daughter Mahalia duets with her father on a mighty rendition of 'Stand Up'.

"Mahalia's just phenomenal. She's been singing with me and my band since she was about fourteen. She has her own band too now. I used to get her up on stage and she'd be at the back, I'd bring her closer to the front and get her to duet with me, I'd have to have my arm around her and encourage her. Then she started singing a bit stronger… now, I just get out of the way and hide!" he laughs. "She's that good, it's scary! She chose 'Stand Up', again from the 'Heat' album. I always loved it, I remember writing it. It was around an election time and I wrote it as a sort of protest song. My opinion was if you didn't stay on the backs of politicians and tell them what you want, nothing would get done. That was what the song was about and Mahalia thought it was like a protest song from the 70s and wanted to give it a Sly And The Family Stone vibe. When it gets to the chorus it's just flying. Her band is awesome too."

With so many great names adding their talents to the album, sadly one planned duet didn't pan out, as John Farnham was due to add his inimitable voice to 'When Your Love Is Gone'.

"He was going to do it, but there was some falling out between his management and his record company," Barnes explains. "It all got very political so I just said to John that we should stand back, let it go this time, and see what happens further down the line. Record company politics - which is a real bummer, because he's a phenomenal singer and a good mate."

The album is bolstered by a typical excellent production from Kevin Shirley, who Barnes had previously worked with on Cold Chisel's album 'No Plans'. Barnes considered nobody else for the production duties.

"When the label and I settled on the idea, he was the first person I spoke to about it. He was instrumental on how we did it. One of the great things Kevin did, and something I learned, was I like to record quickly, learn the tune, press record and just get it down. Kevin, as soon as you walk in, presses the record button. Everything you do, from the minute you walk in, is recorded. Take the version of 'Love And Hate' with Shihad. I sent the song to Jon Toogood and he sent it to each member of the band. They listened to it individually, they didn't listen to it together. They didn't talk about it either, because they wanted to be totally fresh for the session! They walked in, and the red light was already on, recording. Jonny said 'We haven't played this yet, we wanted the first time we did it to be in front of you.' So I said 'Well I'm gonna sing it with you!' And that is the take that's on the record. It's just on the edge, aggressive, fantastic! That mentality ran throughout the record. People were looking at Kevin saying 'What do you mean I'm done? I've hardly started!' and he would just say 'No, we got it.' Kevin made a point of getting everyone done really quick,

really fresh. Once you start thinking about a song, you start showing off or you become predictable. If you capture it raw, you tend to get the best out of people. I worked with him with Cold Chisel and he's my favourite producer in the world right now."

The good news for fans of Jimmy Barnes is this productive relationship with Kevin Shirley has resulted in a lot more in the pipeline.

"He and I have ideas to do another two records next year," the vocalist reveals. "One will be an original Rock record. The other… I've done three Soul albums, he wants me to do one more, maybe in Memphis. He then suggested we do shows, one in Memphis, one in Los Angeles, one in New York, one in London and one in Sydney. We'll film and record them and make a movie. That would tie everything up and probably be a box set. The Soul stuff was always my side project, the stuff I love to sing. That would be a tip of the hat to my roots, it would finish it off. The Rock record is half written, and there's going to be another Cold Chisel album too, which Kevin is also producing. He's fabulous."

The sheer amount of quality albums which have Kevin Shirley at the helm is mind boggling, and Barnes discloses there is no big secret about how it happens.

"He works his arse off! When he came in here, he did my record in like ten days, then he went off with Mahalia and Joe Bonamassa. The two of them did this record together with Kevin, it's just phenomenal and they did it in three days, everything done live in the studio, just blistering stuff."

Getting back to 'Hindsight', one track which doesn't feature any guests, or indeed reside on a previous album, is 'The Other Kind'. It's a song which the singer has a connection with.

"Years ago, in the mid-nineties, the taxman hammered me and I had to sell everything to pay all my bills. I moved to France and while I was there, I was listening to an album called 'The Hard Way' by Steve Earle. 'The Other Kind' was from that album and I loved the lyrics, loved the song and always wanted to do it. I felt it just fitted on this record. I wanted to do one track that was different. The funny thing was, it came around the period when I was writing 'Psyclone'. My song writing had changed, it was more introspective and a lot darker and I was listening to Steve Earle a lot back then. 'Psyclone' was produced by the same guy who did Steve's 'The Hard Way'. When I was making this album, Mahalia told me she had been to the Blues Festival and Steve Earle was there, and had invited me down to his Sydney show to meet him. I went down and it was Steve's last night in Australia. We had a great chat and I told him that 'The Other Kind' had meant so much to me and had really changed how I write songs. He said 'Record it!' so I said 'I will!' If he had been in Australia for a couple more days I'd have had him play on it, but he had to leave the next morning."

A superb version of 'Walk On' can be found near the end of the album, which is a terrific duet between Barnes and another of his offspring, son David Campbell.

"Oh, David's a phenomenal singer. He used to be a full on cabaret singer for many, many years, he did that in New York. I went to see him and I snuck in the back while he was singing. You could hear a pin drop and everyone was just glued to him. There were people crying because he's such an emotional singer. Over the years, he's done some Swing records and he's started singing some Rock lately. 'Walk On' was written by Desmond Child and Joe Lynn Turner, I've always loved it and I put it back in my live set of late. I wanted to give the song another go, I think it was maybe a bit over produced on 'Freight Train Heart', I wanted to strip it back and make it more emotional. David was the first person I thought of so I sent him it and he replied 'Could you pick something higher?'" he laughs. "We had a great time singing it."

With such a great back catalogue of songs to chose from, it would be easy to think that Barnes might have felt there were a couple of omissions, but in actual fact he feels fully satisfied by the finished article.

"By the time we finished recording it felt complete," he says without hesitation. "I sat back and thought, frankly I could do this all day, I love doing this music with my friends, but I think that this collection of songs encapsulates everything I've done over the past thirty years and shows the progress I've made. I've had a lot of fun in those thirty years, but I've also lost a lot of friends… it carried a lot of weight, this record. When I looked at the finished album, I felt it was all there. It's a celebration of blood, sweat and tears."

WHITE WIDDOW

In 2010 Australia's White Widdow stormed onto the scene with a debut album that paid homage to the glorious keyboard-driven Melodic Rock of the eighties. Sophomore release 'Serenade' raised the bar even higher and saw the band trekking around the globe with numerous club shows and festival appearance, including our very own Firefest. However, as they began work on their third album in 2013 they were hit with the tragic news that drummer George Kristy had passed away. Just a year later the nucleus of Jules Millis (vocals), his brother Xavier (keyboards) and guitarist Enzo Almanzi have re-emerged with a new rejuvenated line-up and an excellent new album 'Crossfire'. Ant Heeks called Down Under for a chat with Jules to find out more.

You initially began to work on the new album when your drummer George Kristy passed away, I was really sorry to hear about that.

Thanks mate. Yeah, it was pretty shocking for all of us. We were just doing some loose demos and finishing the arrangements for most of the songs, so he was involved in working with the songs and the demo stages of about half the songs. Then we took a few weeks off to have my brother shape the basic tracks so we could begin recording and the next thing you know we get the phone call to say he's no longer with us. It was quite a shock, we didn't any of us expect for him to take his own life, it was very sudden. He was probably the most energetic, bubbly dude I've ever known, which I guess proves it was somewhat of a mask for him for what he had going on. I think ultimately whatever it was pretty much was going on within his private life at home and he was trying to keep from us, which was his prerogative, but I really wish he'd spoken to us because it's sad to lose someone who's such a great guy and a really good friend. It was pretty horrible.

And he never got to play on a White Widdow album.

Yeah, that's one thing that haunts me a little, it's one thing I really wish we had done together, just because I know he enjoyed being with the band and touring with the band. I know it's one thing he never really got to do in all the other bands he'd been in through the years and it's one thing I kinda wanted to let him have, it just didn't work out that way. We've done what we can, we've put a tribute page in the album, the album's dedicated to him. I guess it's our way of saying goodbye to him.

Why did (original bass player) Trent Wilson leave the band?

Even on the 'Serenade' tour when we toured Europe, Trent only played half the shows. He's basically never really been keen on the touring, just because he gets homesick. I think the more the band evolved and progressed it got further away from what he thought it was gonna be, ultimately it started out fun and it was all well and good while at home, but as we got more successful with getting signed and the albums and playing festivals, I think it became more than what he was interested in being a part of, and so as his life changed and he got into a more serious relationship, he just wanted to stay at home more. It just didn't seem like something he wanted to do any more as far as playing with any band, let alone White Widdow. So he let us know he wanted to step away from touring and eventually writing and recording because there were other things in his life he wanted to do.

So where did you find the new guys?

Well Ben on bass has been a friend of mine and my brothers for over ten years, I actually met him in a record store over a Harem Scarem album! Through the years he had a band, I had a different band, we would do a few gigs together or go and check each other's bands out, and he's a good guy, a great musician, predominantly a guitar player and songwriter but a bit of a multi-instrumentalist. When it came time to talk to Enzo and Xavier about the line-up and moving forward the first name that popped up was Ben and they said "yes, as long as he wants to do it." All it took was one phone call and he was keen to come aboard, and it was through him that we met Noel. He said "I know a drummer I think would be great", so he came along to meet us, we played together to see if it would gel and how the vibe was and it all worked, it was as simple as that. I'll be honest, it made it pretty gentle, especially after losing George and having to move forward, it probably made it the easiest way it could have gone down.

What do you feel they have contributed to White Widdow?

Well Ben definitely brings with him a huge energy, he's a super positive guy so the vibe every time we play together is great, be it a rehearsal or in a recording studio, and he just loves AOR and Melodic Rock. He's just super happy to be there. I think coming out of any tragedy or loss, having that energy thrown back into the mix is infectious, the vibe throughout the band is really positive right now, we're all happy just to be in a room together. As far as Noel is concerned, he's a calm and easy to get along with guy who's an absolutely incredible drummer. George was great, he was a super showman and a lot of fun, but Noel is one of the most technically amazing drummers I've ever had the fortune of playing with, he's a great addition to the band.

What kind of feedback about the album have you had so far?

It's been really positive, I think the only slightly negative thing we've heard is that we haven't been adventurous with our sound, but I don't think that's really what we signed up to be! So far everybody has been positive about it, if anything people are saying it's better than 'Serenade', which is all you can ever hope to achieve.

There are some huge choruses full of harmony vocals. How will you be able to recreate those live?

That's another bonus, both Ben and Noel sing, so when it comes to doing the choruses we now have two more voices where it used to just be Xavier and Enzo with a little bit of Trent. Ben's got a voice strong enough to be a lead singer and Noel's a great backing vocalist, so that was a conscious effort when we considered Ben for the role, we knew it would add a huge element when it came to our live shows. Rehearsals have been amazing!

You've been very complimentary about your brother Xavier's contributions to this album, what exactly was his role apart from playing keyboards?

He pretty much steered the whole album. We recorded the entire record at his new studio here in South Melbourne, he relentlessly worked on it night and day and had all of us shuffling in one after another, he was having to pull fifteen hour days, some of us still have full time jobs so he'd have to work around our schedules. Because we're using his studio, he's engineering and more or less producing the record, and getting the best performance out of all of us, changing things on the fly, trying different things with solos and chord changes in different sections, and really quarterbacked the entire record with me sitting next to him for anything that might have needed significant changes.

When are we likely to see you back in the UK?

We're trying to book a tour at the moment, we'll probably have four or five dates in the U.K. leading up to Hard Rock Hell AOR next year, it'll be good to have the band back over there again, it's been too long. I missed Firefest this year too, it's the first time in eight years I haven't been, I was devastated I couldn't make the last one but unfortunately the Monday after it I had to take off to go to the Kiss Kruise with Tigertailz. It's kind of a balancing act but unfortunately I couldn't juggle it all and something had to give.

How are things going with Tigertailz?

They're okay, for me they're initially a backseat to White Widdow and something I could do as well. I guess there was a period of time when things were quiet for White Widdow and I could spend more time focussed on that, and then since we locked into doing the new record, White Widdow has become the priority for me and I guess that's how it will probably remain, it was never meant to be anything other than the priority. It's good, it's fun, it's unique for me to be in a band that I'm not in charge of and I don't have to organise anything for, so from that point of view it's pretty easy. They send me tour dates saying "Can you do them?" and we take it from there and go out and play. If we're recording, they send me done songs and I just re-record the vocals. It's very much Jay Pepper's project, but I enjoy it, it's a nice change, it keeps me active.

You're onto your third album now. Do you think you've achieved what you set out to do when you first started the band?

To be perfectly honest, I think it's already surpassed everything we ever set out to achieve. I think you get a new goal every time you achieve one; it started with wanting to play this type of music, that led to wanting to record something, that led to a record deal which led to playing Firefest, to have the audience singing the words to 'Broken Hearts Won't Last Forever' back to you, which is the most amazing thing in the world. So it's surpassed everything I ever expected, just because it's unrealistic to expect to do this forever or live off it in this day and age when you're playing a retro style of music. We're all happy with the level that it's at and we're all enthused by the fact that people like our music. To have been able to make three records that people like, absolutely, we're really happy with what we've achieved so far.

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The Birmingham based band, Daylight Robbery, has just released its second album entitled 'Falling Back To Earth' and, like its debut album, to critical acclaim. This is on top of high profile festival gigs in the bag and more to follow soon. A few line-up changes have occurred in the intervening years and so the band now comprises Tony Nicholl (vocals), Mark Carleton (guitars), Colin Murdoch (bass) and new members David Billingham on keyboards and Chris Miller on drums. Rob McKenzie got to speak to lead guitarist Mark Carleton as Daylight Robbery's star continues to rise.

Tell me about the response to your new album, 'Falling Back To Earth'. I for one really enjoyed it and I think it is one of the best Rock albums of the year.

We have been completely overwhelmed with the feedback we have had so far. Every single review has said the first album was good but this one has been so much better. Every song has been killer and not filler; we made a conscious decision that if we weren't happy with the song it wouldn't make it on the album; we wanted quality not quantity.

We invested in getting a top notch engineer, Sheena Shea, who has worked with Robert Plant, Magnum and TNT. She did an unbelievable job engineering the album; we produced it ourselves, we've always been confident in putting a song together and listen from a listeners' perspective and not be self-indulgent. We ended up with an album that we are very pleased with.

Your recent single 'Samarah Never Sleeps' from the album is a very commercial sounding track, what's the story behind the song?

It is essentially a ghost story about someone wronged who just won't forget or let go; for me this is such a clever song and once you hear the chorus it stays with you for days. The work Chris, Col and David undertook in the studio really helped grow the song.

'Paradise is Lost' provides a strong lyrical impact as well.

It's about a 20th century wizard with the answer to poverty but is owned by the bankers! It is the fastest and heaviest track on the album. When I originally put the music together, Tony thought the whole track was too busy and had me change around a couple of things because he had a great verse to go over what I had as the chorus. I love the whole middle section into the solo; but for me the crowning glory is the last pre-chorus into the last chorus. Tony's vocal is just dripping with emotion.

You released the album on your own record label, Solar Flare, which you set up for your debut album. Does this remain a successful venture for you?

The fact is the industry's changed so much now, you can keep control of things yourself – distribution, soft downloads, physical distribution. It's a lot of work but you can do it; we decided that as we did it this way on the first album we would continue that way. We have secured a worldwide distribution from a UK distributor and distribution arms in Germany and Japan and we are talking to someone in the States.

The download release date was 13 October and the physical distribution date was early November.

Following your support of Uriah Heep on the back of your debut album, what gigs have you had recently?

The biggest gig recently for us was Sonisphere; we were contacted out of the blue and we did the Saturday. It was so worth doing and we made a lot of friends; from a personal perspective I met my favourite band Dream Theater.

We did the Legends of Rock festival in Great Yarmouth two weeks ago; we are lined up for further festivals next year including Hard Rock Hell AOR 3.

I know Firefest has finished now; but if it ever re-emerged, would that be a dream gig for you?

Hopefully the natural progression will be for us to play there; I guess once you are asked to play at Firefest - that means you are a bit of a name!

Please give me the lowdown on the two new members in the band.

Chris Miller is the new drummer; I've known him since I was six and he is one of the most gifted drummers. I've always said when you've worked with him; you won't be able to work with anyone else. He has such a feel to his playing in an Ian Paice way, where everything he does is very technical but doesn't feel technical - it just feels very groove oriented. David Billingham [new keyboardist] has a great ear for music. We've always liked fairly epic songs and see our songs as film scores; he's very much of that mindset and he's fantastic at coming up with ideas. With these two on board, it has made our band the perfect line-up – as a unit we get on fantastically well.

The keyboards were a bit higher in the mix on the second album, was that a conscious decision?

As a band, we've always loved the layered keyboards and having a lot of dimensions, with counter melodies and counter harmonies. On the first album, the keyboards weren't compromised; they just weren't quite what we wanted them to be. With David, the keyboards are contributing and saying more within the song rather than being a pad in the background to soften the music up. As a band, this is where we want things to be.

What guitars are you playing at the moment? Your playing sounds pretty quick and slick on the album.

I used to have two USA Peavey EVH Wolfgangs, the black and the amber burst ones. I have always loved Musicman guitars – the Steve Morse, Steve Lukather and John Petrucci models. At the moment, my favourite guitar to play is the Japanese made Yamaha RGX. I got it for about £300 and it's the best guitar I've ever played; it beats all the EVHs and Ibanez Jems I've had. It is the most absurdly brilliant playing guitar and looks gorgeous – that's one I'm not getting rid of.

To close off, what are Daylight Robbery thoughts and hopes for 2015?

It's going to be a lot of work getting out there at as many events as we can. We've had a nod that we are going to be at Sonisphere again – I'm not sure what stage it will be on. We are looking forward to Hard Rock Hell AOR again, we enjoyed the first one and we went down fantastically well on the main stage considering people didn't know us. It was a bit of a trial by fire as we didn't have a keyboard player and we had two weeks to sort out click tracks so that recorded keyboard bits could be triggered! We will be announcing more festival dates soon.

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nubianRose

Nubian Rose have just released their sensational sophomore album 'Mental Revolution' which is reviewed by our own Mark Donnelly in this issue. Mark Donelly got the opportunity to ask husband and wife Christer Åkerlund and Sofia Lilja about the new album.

Following the sensational reaction to your debut album 'Mountain' did you feel a real pressure in the recording of the new album?

Sofia: Are you kidding me?!? YES! We started to write the first song while we were still high on the reaction from fans and media, before the performance anxiety could kick in. First we wrote 'The Eye', and then Christer bought a new guitar, a George Lynch tiger super-strat lookalike, which kind of just gave him the riffs for a couple of songs.

Christer: I believe that every good instrument has a couple of good songs in them, it's just important that you respect this and give the new instrument a couple of hours as soon as it's in your possession. I got the riffs for 'Tough Guys...' and 'Higher', so what can I say, that instrument paid off!

We decided early on that we should not guess what the fans were going to want from Nubian Rose, after the sensational reaction of 'Mountain'. The worst anxiety actually came after the album was recorded. We were certain that we had done something really good, something that we really believed in. We had no idea if the rest of the World would agree, but at least we knew that even if nobody else liked it, we loved it and in the end that's the most important thing.

How to you set about the writing process?

Christer: It mostly starts with me coming up with guitar riffs, putting together chords and making the instrumental demos. I set the attitude and the style of the song and then Sofia comes in and makes it pretty; the melodies, the lyrics and so on. She has an amazing sense for melodies, so it's always fun to see what comes out of the songs when she puts her stamp on it. I suck when it comes to writing melodies, but when I hear something that isn't good enough I push Sofia to make it great and she always delivers. Sometimes it's Sofia who comes up with the musical foundation such as 'Time Again' that she wrote on the piano. I'm usually very productive when I get in the phase. Sofia, on the other hand, has a much longer start-up phase and it can take a while before she gets over the fence. Since our pace is so very different, we rarely write together at the same time. For family peace, it's better, therefore, if we write separately!

Where did the title of the album come from and is there any meaning behind it?

Christer: The title of the album, 'Mental Revolution', comes from a line in the song 'Illuminated Within'. Marx said that religion is the opium of the people. That might have been true in the late 1800's, but today entertainment is the opium of the people. It keeps them from thinking and people who are not thinking are dangerous. They can easily be misled, by misinformation, prejudice, thoughts and fear of things they don't know anything about. I believe that most evil is grounded in fear and if peoples' minds are too clouded then they will easily fall for the fear. Look at Europe today, what the hell is going on? It wasn't so long ago that Nazi's and fascist's ruled our continent; a lot of blood was spilled to fight that evil and today a lot of those thoughts are surfacing again, even amongst ancestors of those who died to fight that evil. I believe that mankind needs a revolution, a mental revolution!

Sofia: I think that the world around us is falling in to a kind of mental coma. They are spending a massive amount of time doing absolutely nothing except watching TV, hanging out on Facebook, or playing moronic games on their "smart phones". People want to be fed by light entertainment. They can't stand a "dull" moment. Most people are so afraid to be left with their own thoughts; afraid of what happens when they let their minds flow freely.

The production on 'Mental Revolution' is fantastic. Have you been asked to produce any other albums as you obviously have a real talent for producing?

Christer: Dude, I'm really touched by hearing that from you, thanks! This is the first album that I have solely produced although I pulled a lot of the producing strings on 'Mountain'. If I get an offer of producing someone else, I will definitely consider it, but I would have to share the same views about the music. I wouldn't do any project, just to produce.

What are your favourite songs from the album and do you like the heavier songs equally as much as the more melodic ones?

Sofia: That's a very tricky question. I have some favourites, but they change every day. We are practising our live set at the moment and it's almost impossible to choose songs that will not be on the set list.

Christer: 'Break Out' is probably the song I like the most to play, but I think that our finest work as songwriters to date is 'Higher' and I love to play that also. The energy of 'War' is great to play, but the way that 'Time Again' builds throughout the song is also something I love to play.

Have you any plans to tour the album?

Sofia: Yes, of course, we are all about playing live. When we write and record, we always have the live show in mind, so we are dying to get out there and give those songs real life! We will do some shows in Sweden and will be in London on February 4th for a show at the Barfly. We are hoping to do a full tour of the UK later in 2015, but nothing is set yet.

There is a current upsurge in the popularity of female-fronted Rock bands. What do you think is the reason for this and who are your personal favourites out of these bands?

Christer: To be honest, I have no idea! Maybe there are so many male-fronted bands out there, so people want something different, a different sound, different kind of expression and therefore they are checking out female-fronted bands instead.

Have you anything else that you would like to say?

Sofia: There's an amazing crowd of enthusiastic fans of Melodic Hard Rock all over the world. A lot of them took Nubian Rose to their heart and have been giving us so much love and appreciation during these years since our debut, that it's very touching, really. We hope that we can give something back and that they like 'Mental Revolution' so much that they can consider it a down payment!

ROBBY VALENTINE

Neil French caught up with Dutch maestro Robby Valentine to discuss his various projects past and present but most importantly the imminent release of his new album. Welcome to the 'Bizarro World' of Robby Valentine.

So Robby the album's called 'Bizarro World' is that a DC Comics reference in there?

Yes exactly. I'm not really a big fan but I just liked the story behind 'Bizarro World'. I don't know what year it was, like an early 60s thing, but everything's opposite **[to how it is on earth]** and that's mainly how I kind of felt, and still feel, these past twenty years or so. Everything I like and I do, the way I present myself, the music, I feel kind of alienated and trying to figure out what's the 'Bizarro World', my world or the world outside. That's kind of the main theme behind it.

You've been playing a couple of gigs and a few months ago you did a small showcase gig to tryout some of the new songs and you also released a limited edition EP. What was the thinking behind that?

It was kind of a teaser but we planned that gig maybe three months before. We wanted to do the presentation of the new album but it wasn't right, I didn't think the time was right to release an album right before the summer and the festivals. We thought, we haven't been playing for three or four years, it's a nice little warm up for the new band and for people to get into it again and that's why we also put out the little teaser with three tracks from the album and two tracks that won't be on the album.

I have to say I'm loving the new material, perhaps a little more immediate than the last couple of releases.

Yes I think it's a bit more radio friendly. The thing that surprised me a lot was the track called 'Deadbeat Boy', it was received so well. Nobody knew it at the shows and still they were clapping along. It was cool. Last month we played at Metalfest in Rotterdam and there were a lot of Metal fans screaming in between songs, "Slayer, Slayer" and then I thought this is for all the Slayer fans, they were doing this little dance, a strange Pogo, I'm not really making fun of it, but it even worked with them, it was cool to see.

As you mentioned you have a new band, tell us who's in it right now.

The drummer is Andre Borgman he's originally from the Dutch Gothic band After Forever. Then Johan Willems, Jay Jay, I've known him since 1984. We started demoing little things, his tracks, my tracks and we found that our voices fit together pretty well. If I need the choirs to be a bit thicker I ask him and it's been that way since the late 80s. Then you've got Paul Coenradie. I actually stole him from Aniday, the band of Marlies, my girlfriend, because my previous guitar player Cyril Whistler totally fell out of love with playing live. Paul stepped in for five or six concerts so that was an easy choice. Andre came up with his friend Luuk van Gerven, the bass player from After Forever and it's fantastic. He has a lot of energy on stage, lots of attack. It comes so easy to him. It's a joy to play with them.

You briefly touched on Aniday there fronted by your partner Marlies. You finally put the album out earlier this year. Tell us about Aniday and how it came together.

Well the drummer, Danny, he thought they should get better songs and told them, "I know someone who may be able to write us some songs." I didn't know Marlies at the time, of course I'd seen her on TV with the Idols show, but we got together and I wrote one song called 'Lost The Way'. I had a lot of songs written before that for a project called Kyssmet which was kind of dead. Right at that moment Marlies and I became acquainted. She started to use maybe eight of my songs. I wasn't in the band yet as I didn't feel like being in a band as a keyboard player. They started recording my songs and I didn't want to have anything to do with it but I heard what they'd done and I wasn't happy with my babies, the songs. So I stepped in and said "OK you can use my tapes." Then we put real drums on it, Marlies re-did the vocals and we did a remix that became the album. For some reason we were not successful finding a suitable record company and things got in between, so that album was shelved, but after a few years we thought it was a shame. We are playing with it and it should be out, so Marlies decided to put some energy into it.

And you went down the route of self releasing it via your website and I think a couple of other websites in Europe. You're going down the same route with 'Bizarro World'. Is it so difficult to get a deal?

It is difficult, especially in Holland and always when they take a chance to hear it they look at the picture and think, well the long hair and make-up, we don't think we can put it on the radio. To be honest I haven't really looked too hard for a label because I know the situation. It's not ideal because by doing it yourself you will never get on the radio, that chance is very small, but we're doing a very limited release, so we're hoping at some point somebody may step in because doing it by ourselves it's just too much work.

You're coming over to the UK to play at the Queen Convention again but this time with a full band. It's more or less sold out, so it should be good.

Yes I'm really excited. Of course it's a lot more fun to do it with a band than to do a one man show going to the piano and the guitar. Actually we did 'Bohemian Rhapsody' at a Bizzaro World show and for me it was a dream come true to do it with a full band.

Going back in time can I ask you about your old friend Peter Strykes from 1st Avenue. What do you recall about that time and how did you get back with him to put out the Peter Strykes 'Sings Robby Valentine' album?

Yeah in '87 I started 1st Avenue and then Peter joined the band. It was quite promising for a while but after about a year and a half I was getting quite frustrated at just being the main writer and the lunatic behind the keyboards, so I thought it was time I took the step to be a solo artist. I got some opportunities with some record companies so in '89 I quit. Later Peter and I became friends again and he was stepping more into the Pop Classical world. I thought his voice was very suitable for that so I started to write in that atmosphere. We did four songs but we didn't do anything with it until 2006 when I picked it up again and we did the Peter Strykes Robby Valentine album but then again nothing happened with it and he became a member of LA: The Voices.

Visit http://www.robbyvalentine.nl/ to order Bizarro World.

Triosphere are a Female-Fronted Progressive Heavy Metal band from Norway. The group was formed in 2004, releasing one EP and two albums. Triosphere has now returned with their third album 'The Heart Of The Matter' and Dave Scott was given the opportunity to put some questions to Marius Silver Bergesen and Ida Haukland to find out more about the new release.

Most bands seem to release albums in much quicker succession these days, but you took four years with 'The Heart Of The Matter'. Did you always intend to take this long or has it simply taken that length of time for you to make the album that you wanted?

M: That is just how long it has taken us to write all the material, and take the time to really try out all possible arrangements, keys and so on, to make sure each and every song is the best it could possibly be. Both Haukland and I are quite the perfectionists and we also find it way more important to make sure our albums are something we will always be proud of, than just having new music out more frequently. That being said, we would have really liked to have our releases with a shorter interval, but we've also had to be our own booking agent and tour promoter the last few years, so that's also taken up a lot of our time. We've done three long European tours since the last album, so that's where most of the time has been spent.

Before talking about the new album, there has also been a recent line-up change; if you are happy and able to, can you explain the reasons for it and introduce the new member?

M: You are absolutely right, after finishing the recording of this album, our drummer left the band. This is the first line-up change we've ever had, and we were all really sad to see him go, as he is both a fantastic drummer and a good friend. His reason for leaving was simply that he got married and welcomed his first child last year. We have had a long time to prepare for this however, since he has not been able to tour with us since 2011. The last three European tours were done with substitute drummers. Our new drummer is called Kenneth Tårneby, and he is just incredible! His playing has blown the three of us away since day one, and as a person he just fit in with the rest of us right from the start.

Can you give our readers an insight into the meaning of the title and did you arrive at that before or after you had written the songs?

M: The title was actually the last piece of the puzzle to fall into place. It came to me while we were in Belgium recording the vocals. Before that, I had a few suggestions and especially one that we all liked, so we had basically decided on that and stopped thinking about the title. But while we did the vocals, and after all the lyrics were done, it just became obvious that the album had to be 'The Heart Of The Matter'. It sums up the content of the lyrics, which all are very much connected to each other, and it also sums up what we wanted to achieve musically with this album. We wanted to sort of "cut" the songs down to the core, make sure every single part, every note, served the song in an efficient way. In other words we wanted to get to the heart of the matter of each song, also musically and arrangement wise.

I know you place great importance on the lyrical content of your songs; which tracks on the new album are most important or special to you from the subject matter perspective?

I: All the lyrics mean something special to me but there are a few that stand out a bit more and that's 'Breathless', 'The Heart's Dominion', 'Remedy', 'Storyteller' and 'Virgin Ground'. These have good and strong stories that I feel I managed to tell in an interesting way with nice imagery and phrasing. I'll leave it to the listeners to make their own interpretation of them.

How do the songs fit in with the album's title?

I: All the lyrics are individual stories without any clear connection as such, but they are all connected to a main theme on the album; a theme that I see as the heart of the matter in a person's life...love. And I don't mean the stereotypical romantic love between two people, but the immensely strong emotion that love is, and its ability to take control over our actions and decisions, both in good and bad ways. So 'Breathless' tells a story about forgotten love and how painful it can be for those who no longer can receive it, '...Dominion' is about a accepting a corrupted love that you no longer can try to save, accept what it has been and just move on. 'Remedy' is about the everlasting hopeful but challenging love, 'Storyteller' is about defeated love that you try to ignore and '... Ground' is about love as a channel of hope, bravery and determination when the world around you seems to burn.

Despite still containing the Metal and Progressive content, it sounds like you have upped the hook and melody quota, was that a conscious decision or just a natural turn of events?

M: For me, having a chorus being too or overly catchy is not possible, so I always want Haukland to work on getting the hook quota up. I think she really did a great job this time. The hooks are stronger, and the vocal performances themselves are truly awesome, which also contributes to making the songs catchier. I think our fans will find all the elements they have liked in our music previously still present; a lot of strong riffs, great vocals and intricate guitar and drum parts. In addition to that they will find a wider range and variety than what we've had before. If you listen to '...Dominion' and then '... Ground' for instance, you will definitely hear a part of her that you've never heard before.

Chris Pettersen supervised the string arrangements on your previous album and returns to help with your new release. Did he contribute in the same way again and was it a natural decision to work with him again?

M: Yes, the way we worked with him was the same as on 'The Road Less Travelled'. We were really happy that he agreed to keep working with us, because he is simply brilliant and the work he does is something we could have never done without him! For some of the parts I just record what

we want with a guitar and he transforms it into an arrangement that makes sense for an orchestra. On other songs, we just told him what our vision was, and even with that little to go on, he was able to pull it off. And I have to say, in most of the songs his arrangements outdid our expectations big time!

Another returning contributor is Espen Godo; how does he feature on the album and what does he specifically bring to the sound overall that makes you want to work with him on each album?

M: Godo does all the piano, mellotron and organ playing on the album. Just like Pettersen, he is a guy that we bring in just before the mixing, when all the songs are recorded and finished to add that little magic that he brings. Having him on board is a privilege!!

The mixing and mastering aspects of the album were handled by Jens Bogren; how did you come to work with him and what drew you to working with him?

M: I have wanted to work with Bogren since 2010. The reason we chose him is that I think that Metal productions these days sound more and more alike. When I first started listening to Metal you would instantly know who was playing when you heard a new record. If you take Guns 'N' Roses and Metallica for instance, even if you had never heard 'Appetite For Destruction' or 'The Black Album' before, you would never be in doubt as to who were who once you put them on. Back then, producers let the artists sound like themselves a bit more. Now, with all the technology, it has become the rule instead of the exception that drum sounds are replaced by samples that the guy who does the mix has, and guitars are re-amped using his gear. That makes it easy for the guy who mixes to keep his productions consistent, and deal with stuff he knows inside and out, but it also makes the bands that use his or her studio come out sounding very much alike. Bogren is an exception in that regard for me. I think his productions sound very different, and that the bands that use him get to keep what makes them unique, but at the same time get the quality that only he and a few others in the world are able to deliver sonically.

I have seen you all mention that playing live is one of the most important things to you as a band. Will you be hitting the road for any sort of tour to promote the album and most importantly, have you any plans to be playing in the U.K. again? In addition the last time you played in the U.K. was at the end of 2012 with Kamelot and Xandria; what are your memories of that night and are you looking forward to playing in the U.K. again?

M: Touring is absolutely one of the most important things for us. Playing live is what makes all the hard work worthwhile. It doesn't matter how many hours, weeks, months and years of hard work it takes to write, rehearse and record an album - and trust me, it is A LOT of work - once you get on that stage in front of a huge crowd and get to play a show where everything is just right, all those hours are forgotten in seconds. I remember that show with Kamelot and Xandria at The Forum as a great evening, very cool crowd!! We also did seven shows in the U.K. on the tour before that one, that time with Sonata Arctica. We really want to tour as much as possible in 2015. I would love to play London again, and I also remember Manchester as being superb!

TIME FOR A REVOLUTION...

Keep your eyes and ears open for **Revolution Saints**, coming in February. A band which has, according to **Deen Castronovo**, been "born out of the minds of Frontiers Records", Revolution Saints brings together the Journey drummer (and arguably the best singer the band has had since Steve Perry), the Nightranger vocalist, bass man **Jack Blades** and guitar god and former Whitesnake axe-man **Doug Aldrich**.

As you can imagine, this is a huge record – the best mix you can think of between all three bands, but with all the members being able to firmly stamp their own identities on the tracks. Castronovo exclaims "it's like 1980's vibe Rock – with nuts!" and he's not wrong there!

Produced by Frontiers "go to" impresario Alessandro Del Vecchio, his skill is evident on the stunning 'Turn Back Time', which will be the first single from the album. The band say that Del Vecchio has allowed them to really be themselves and be the best they can be, which is shown throughout.

"Immediately when I heard the demo, I thought, wow!" Aldrich says. "This reminds me of a band I was in called Lion, but it also had the flair and melodicness of bands like Journey. I approached it from a place like I was in at that time – tried to put my spin on it so that it would take it into a new area."

A couple of the tracks are duets between Castronovo and Blades but on 'You're Not Alone' Arnel Pineda features as a co-lead. You really can't deny the huge Journey influences here and, just to cement that, Neal Schon offers up a solo on 'Way To The Sun'.

Blades says enthusiastically: "Castronovo went crazy on it with the drums and I thought, dude, you've given me a green light on this one, so I'm going to take it too, so I did a lot of wild stuff on the bass, reminiscent of Damn Yankees."

This is Aldrich playing like you feel you've wanted him to play for years – so nice to hear him (and Castronovo for that matter) playing new material and not just Journey or Whitesnake. In fact, the musicianship all the way through is stunning.

Castronovo really shows his versatility as a vocalist and this is an album which will remove any doubts about his ability and firmly cement him as one of the best Rock vocalists out there. "Will they be able to do it live?" I hear you ask, well, having seen Castronovo singing and playing for Journey on many occasions, I feel sure it won't be a problem for him.

Set for release in February 2015, there will no doubt be comparisons drawn to Castronovo and Blades' former collaboration Damn Yankees, but failing a reunion, this is the next best thing……or is this a BETTER option? In my mind, it's veering towards the latter, but you can make up your own minds when the album is released.

Until then, let me just end by saying – there is so much about this album that just screams quality and class. These three musicians have got it all. Definitely the most anticipated album of the new year for me.

Sue Ashcroft

BLACK FATE

Black Fate are a Greek band who play Melodic Metal in the vein of Kamelot and Conception. Their excellent new album 'Between Visions & Lies' has just been released and Ian Johnson talks with the band's guitarist Gus Drax about it.

I know that you've been around since the early 90s and this will be your fourth studio album. Please tell us about the band's history.

Black Fate was formed back in 1990 in Larissa Greece. The band released two demos called 'Black Fate' and 'A Piece Of Dream', which earned great reviews from the Greek Metal media and the band started playing their first shows. In 2000 the band released its first album called 'Uncover' and two years later the two first demos were also re-released together on an album titled 'A Piece Of Dream'. In 2007 Nikos Tsintzilonis met Vasilis Georgiou and decided to put Black Fate back on track. They started working on new material for a new album and began to make plans for a new beginning for the band. The result of all this work was the album 'Deliverance Of Soul' that was released in 2009. After that album's release the old line up couldn't follow the band's live obligations and the search for new band members started. Me and Vasilis Liakos joined the band which led to this day's line-up.

Vasilis Georgiou is, I think, your secret weapon, his vocals really do make all the songs stand out from the crowd.

I don't even think he's a secret weapon, ha,ha. I think he is certainly one of the band's biggest weapons. In my opinion, and I don't say this because we are band mates in two bands, Vasilis is a world class singer and really makes all the songs stand out as you mentioned. The way he uses his voice, his melodies and his approach on how the vocals should be in a song, makes him stand out from other singers and makes him unique. The fact that he was between the three top candidates to replace Roy Khan in Kamelot proves that.

You have a sound that is very European in nature, I can detect a lot of Kamelot, Conception and Seventh Wonder influences in your music. Was this the sound and style of music you wanted to be involved with?

Well, we try to play a Melodic style of Metal with some Prog Metal elements in there, some Power Metal elements, so yeah I think there is a lot of common ground, especially with Conception and Kamelot. I should also add Queensryche, Dream Theater and Iron Maiden as some of our biggest influences. We don't try to have the same sound as any of these bands to be honest, we try to have our own sound but as far as the influences go, yes these bands are certainly among them.

There are some complex lyrics and melodies on the new album. Where do you get your song writing ideas from and is there a theme or concept to the songs?

We are an inspiration-based band. Our songs are based on ideas that are coming from our inspirations and then we work on them, changing and refining stuff and then adding the lyrics and the vocal melody lines. 'Between Visions And Lies' is not a concept album. It's ten different songs but each song has a story to tell, a little concept behind it. We are not just writing words that make a rhyme.

Also the song titles like 'Rhyme Of A False Orchestra' ,'Lines In The Sand' and 'Game Of Illusion' are intriguing. What are they about?

All of our songs, not only these three, are informed by the relationships we have in our lives, the relationships with our friends with our wives or girlfriends, our families and so on and basically our own selves. Our lyrics are a mixture of fantasy and inspiration and we try to write this way so that the listener can "connect" and relate with what we say in his own way and life.

The production on the album is wonderful, it gives the songs a big overall sound. Who produced the album and are you happy with the end result?

I'm really happy you think so. We are responsible for the production of the album. Nikos, our drummer, mixed it wonderfully and Erik Tordsson did the mastering at the Solid Mix studios in Sweden. We worked on everything until we were satisfied with the final result.

Will the band be touring in support of the new album and if so where and when?

I don't have a specific tour to announce to you yet but we will definitely be touring and playing as many shows as possible for 'Between Visions And Lies'. One show that is actually confirmed is in Thessaloniki opening for Sanctuary but I'm pretty sure there are going to be other shows as well before this one.

What next for the band, Gus?

Well, like I said before, playing as many shows as possible, promoting the band and the new album and probably at some point we'll start working on new material!

THE BEARDS

They're back. They're as hairy as usual – and as hilarious as ever! The Aussie band The Beards have just released their fourth album, proudly entitled 'The Beard Album', leaving no doubt about them still being all about the careful maintenance of their facial hair. Sadly, Alexandra Mrozowska was beardless while discussing an album and the band's unique formula with The Beards' frontman Johann Beardraven, but somehow they managed to keep the conversation all things beardy.

What's so special about the beards that you've decided on making the cultivation of facial hair the "leitmotif" of your entire career?

We've been asked that question a lot and to be honest it's hard to describe the magical energy of the beard. I mean, on the surface the reasons are obvious – beards look good, they smell good, they make you instantly manlier and more attractive, they're a convenient storage location for food scraps… but beneath that, there's a certain mystical power that a beard has. Having a beard really just makes you feel 100% awesome, like, all of the time. It's a feeling that only a true beard owner can know.

The lyrics on the new album as well as its predecessors are simply hilarious. Is maintaining a beard a never-ending source of inspiration for a bearded lyricist?

Yeah, our own beards are pretty inspirational. Plus we just love beards so much, it's actually not that hard to keep coming up with new ways to express that love, and the fact that we've had beards for a long time now means that there's lots of different aspects of bearded life that we've experienced that we can draw on for our songs. We like to have pretty regular writing sessions together, that way we can look at each other's beards if we ever need extra inspiration. That can have its drawbacks too though – we often get so caught up with staring at each other's glorious beards that we forget to do any writing. The last album took quite a long time to write because of that, actually.

Which of the songs on 'The Beard Album' do you think are its strongest points and why?

Well, 'All The Bearded Ladies' was an important song for us to write, I think. We hadn't really reached out to the much-ostracised bearded woman before. They certainly deserve as much recognition as the men. Within weeks of releasing it, Conchita Wurst had won Eurovision, so it was pretty much mission accomplished there. Also, 'I Like Beards' is a significant track, it really gets back to basics for us and sums up our attitude towards beards really well. And 'Bit Of My Beard' contains the word beard sixty-five times, which is a good amount… actually, all the songs are great now that I think about it. They're great because they're about beards.

Lyrical jokes aside 'The Beard Album' is surprisingly diverse music-wise. Is this diversity an attempt to avoid being categorized by the reviewers and listeners?

Not really, we like being categorized, as long as the category is "extremely fond of beards". The musical diversity isn't really a conscious thing though. When we're writing, the beard comes first and the music is more or less an afterthought. We don't really like music that much; too often it gets in the way of the beard. In the past we have tried listening to other bearded musicians for inspiration, people like Cat Stevens or Seasick Steve, but usually it doesn't do much for us. The problem is that they just don't write any songs about beards, which just seems like a huge waste of time.

Aren't you afraid the band's formula becomes repetitive as years go by?

I'm sure we will, yeah. Even after the first album people were assuming that we'd run out of ideas but those people tend to underestimate how much we like beards. Although we are starting to run out of words to rhyme with 'beard' but I'm sure we'll think of more. The thing is, as our beards get longer, not only do we become more fervently pro-beard but we also naturally become better musicians and songwriters, so it stands to reason that not only will we keep releasing albums, but that those albums will keep getting better and better as our beards get better. On a side note, our longer beards mean we also become better at other things like wood chopping, changing a tyre, consuming alcohol, stuff like that… it's science.

Soon the bearded crusade invades Europe – the UK included – with plenty of tour dates already announced. What are your expectations?

Well, each time we've gone over we've seen significant increases in the size and quantity of beards at our shows, and this time will hopefully be no different. The biggest beards so far tend to be in Germany and Scotland, so we're definitely looking forward to getting back to those countries. Plus this time we're going to Sweden and Norway for the first time and we've heard some good things about their beards, so we're excited about that. Also just being on the road gives us plenty of time to grow our own beards and talk about beards with each other and we get to sing about beards, meet lots of people with beards… it's going to be a beardy time.

What's the audience on your gigs? Are there any beardless people, or only ZZ Top lookalikes?

Well these days the numbers of the bearded in the crowd dominates the beardless, which is great for us when we're looking out from the stage. We do still encourage beardless people to come to the gigs though, we understand that every beardless face is still a potential beard. Hopefully the clean-shaven in the crowd will get swept up in the beard euphoria and make the life-changing decision to grow a beard. Mostly the beardless tend to stay toward the back of the room, which is lucky, because the sight of someone without a beard can sometimes make our guitarist Facey McStubblington physically ill, but occasionally you'll get some loudmouth beardless guy who wants to come down the front and carry on. Rest assured we know how to put them in their place pretty quick. Plus there's always lots of big bearded blokes in the crowd that can sort things out for us.

Is there anything you'd like to add, maybe a word or two to encourage the clean-shaved readers to put their razors away?

Actually yeah, I would like to say this… no matter what you do in life, the most important thing is making sure you always believe in yourself, follow your own dreams, and don't let adversity stand in the way of doing what you believe in. Always stay true to yourself, and most importantly, follow your own path and don't listen to what other people tell you to do. Also, make sure you grow a beard.

One of those things is Rated X, the brand new band featuring vocalist Joe Lynn Turner, bassist Tony Franklin, drummer Carmine Appice and guitarist Karl Cochran. Joe Lynn Turner explains to James Gaden about the "Rated X curse", enduring a year of hurdles and overcoming a tragedy, in the name of Rock N Roll...

The origins of Rated X began like many projects out there, via the vision of Frontiers leader Serafino Perugino.

"Serafino approached me months before we started with the idea that he wanted a project consisting of notable players to showcase my voice," Turner explains. "The Sunstorm albums were great and he was looking for something with more big names involved. I didn't pay much mind to it at the time because nowadays the only way to make a living is to tour, so I stayed out touring. I had a two week break where I came back home and got a call from Carmine, asking what was going on with this potential project. I said that I'd just gotten back home and hadn't looked at it. He said 'Well I'm in!' and I thought that's great, and he said 'Tony Franklin's gotta play bass, we have to convince him!' We both called him and got Tony on board. Then we started to go through a list of available guitar players. We got Bruce Kulick, he was the first guy. With Bruce, because we were all seasoned professionals, we all put egos aside and said instead of seeing it as a project, let's treat this as a brand new band.

"The problem was Bruce couldn't fully commit because he is still playing with Grand Funk Railroad," the vocalist continues. "He was with us a couple of months and we did some writing and it was okay, but it wasn't great. Finally, we just said 'Look, let's just part friends and leave it' and that was that. Then we had to look at who the hell else was available! I'd been in Mother's Army with Carmine and the guitar player on those records was Jeff Watson. He's a virtuoso, he's brilliant, so we called him up. He was happy to join in, but he warned us he's a studio owner and his studio took up a lot of his time. He thought he could manage the two and we sent him some tracks. About a month and a half later, he doesn't even have two songs finished. We were thinking 'Well, what the fuck?' He said he was working on it but truth be told, he was piece-mealing it. He was busy with his studio, making a living, and he almost finished two tracks, but they weren't super great, I'm sorry to say. I said 'We love you Jeff, but we can't work like this. We need somebody who can be there for this.' He was cool with that."

At this point Turner took matters into his own hands and suggested one of his long term collaborators from his solo career.

"I turned to Tony and Carmine and said 'I got the guy!' and suggested Karl Cochran. He's written with me on my solo albums, he's played on my records, he's played in my band, he's a guitar star waiting to happen. I suggested we put him on a track or two to see what happened. We put him on 'This Is Who I Am' and 'Fire And Ice' and he killed it. We all knew – he played in the pocket, he was exactly what we needed, he got it, he was perfect for us."

Unfortunately, disaster struck when Karl suffered a stroke during the making of the record, leaving him paralyzed down one side of his body.

"Karl was working as musical director for Flavor Flav, who was doing Sly And The Family Stone stuff. The night he played at the Iridium in New York, he started to get what's called a TIA, which is the warning signs of a stroke," Turner says ruefully. "And nobody brought him to a hospital. There he is, an up and coming guitar star and he's finally coming into his own, and that happens to him. I was in Germany at the time, doing the 'Rock Meets Classic' tour with Alice Cooper. Carmine Skyped me and told me what had happened. When we heard, my wife Maya and I were just crying uncontrollably, we couldn't stop. He was supposed to have died. Miraculously he didn't.

"When we heard, my wife Maya and I were just crying uncontrollably, we couldn't stop. He was supposed to have died. Miraculously he didn't."

Rated X vocalist Joe Lynn Turner on his band mate Karl Cochrane suffering a paralyzing stroke during the recording of the album.

"I and a bunch of other notable musicians got together in New York City and we threw a benefit for him. We called it 'Rock 'N' Recovery' and we raised over $25,000. Karl's been doing conventional therapy as well as things like acupuncture and I asked him how it was working out. He raised his right arm up to his shoulder! You gotta remember he was basically paralyzed – his leg too, because it happened on the left side. The left side, unfortunately, includes cognitive ability, your speech, so he has to basically re-learn that. He can understand you perfectly, and he knows what he wants to say, he just can't say it. It's so fucking frustrating, it's heartbreaking. His speech is improving, but that will probably take longer than anything. I knew the brain has the two sides, the left side is more analytical and the right side is the more creative – but I learned the brain will take over what is lacking on one side and compensate with the other. Just amazing. Because of that, the doctors feel he has a good chance. With everyone pulling for him, the money we've raised for his bills and so many great reviews for this record, he's really excited about things, very positive. He's absolutely determined to come back and that's great, strong of mind and strong of will is what you need, but as you can imagine, there are down days for him. We raised a lot of money for him and we'll try and raise more. With medical bills in this day and age – don't get sick! It's very costly and we're all trying to help Karl as much as we can. He has some medical insurance but you've heard of Obama-Care? I think it was more like Obama doesn't care, he fucked us on that one. As long as you're well, everything is good, but don't get sick."

With that tragedy happening during the making of the album, there was the urgent matter of finishing off the remaining guitar parts.

"Karl had completed seven tracks and I think he'd done the rhythm guitar on an eighth but there weren't any solos on there yet," the singer explains. "Serafino was going to get Alex Beyrodt in – I've toured with him and he only had like three days because he was going out with Primal Fear. I said to him 'Alex, you're a fantastic guitar player but I need to get Nikolo Kotzev on this.' Nikolo is one of the most unsung heroes in my opinion, he's just brilliant. I felt Nikolo was the guy to go to. He did the remaining tracks, which were 'Our Love Is Not Over', 'Maybe Tonight', 'Peace Of Mind' and he and Karl are both on 'Don't Cry No More' and 'Stranger In Us All'. Nik is just amazing and he did it for nothing because he felt for Karl and wanted to help us out."

Even more amazingly, Karl Cochran's medical problems weren't the only ones Rated X faced while making their debut album.

"It really sounds like we cut this all together like in the olden days, when in reality we never recorded any of it in the same room. Because of the technology we have, we used phones, email, Skype, you name it, we were always in touch. Tony might be putting his bass down and even though Carmine and I weren't there, we could listen in on Skype and talk about it. Or we'd send files to each other then discuss them on the phone. It just started taking shape that way. The music really sounds alive, it's got excitement, drama, ups and downs… but we really didn't know how it would sound until Pat Regan put the mixes together. There's such colour on this album, from heavy to melodic… it's a killer album that I'm very proud of, especially with the trials and tribulations we encountered. Not just with Karl - it took us a full year, we had corrupt files, so many things going wrong we referred to a Rated X curse! It was a labour of love – it was supposed to be out in September, we had to put it back because we were correcting and fixing things, it was tough. We believe in this band though. We are looking at playing some festivals, getting out there. Every one of us could probably make more money playing solo but we decided for a few weeks we'd do some shows to let people know hey, this is Rated X!"

The material has a lot in common with the member's back catalogues. The presence of Franklin and Appice offers a taste of Blue Murder, many of the hooks would be at home on Turner's solo albums and the augmentation of Alessandro Del Vecchio's keyboard work adds flavours similar to Deep Purple.

"This is no longer just a singer's band, this is a band of real players," Turner agrees. "It's a song writers band. We have great songs that are catchy and all, but there's Tony doing a bass solo part, which goes into a Carmine solo part… especially on 'Lhasa'. That song is huge. You can picture all these guys in a desert, it has a real cinematic visual feel to it. There's a Pink Floyd vibe there, Carmine builds the drums up, Karl's solo… I got chills. I stood away and just listened to it with headphones and fuck, it's an experience. The music takes you on a journey, and I think that's lacking in music today. A lot of people don't really listen to albums from start to finish. If you listen to this, I think it does take you on a journey and it goes by so quickly, it's not boring. We've got all sorts on there… 'Maybe Tonight' is definitely a more romantic track, it was actually the first song I wrote for my wife. That started out more Pop and this band toughened it up and it just works."

Rated X boasts two thirds of Blue Murder in the line up, but had history have been a little different, it could easily have been three quarters, as Turner was suggested as a potential singer for John Sykes' group early on.

"Yeah, Sykes put the kibosh on that because years before, I had gone out with his girlfriend," Turner replies. "He said it wasn't going to work for him. He probably didn't want to work with someone who had been with his girlfriend, I understand that! It's an incestuous business anyway. I always remember Robert Plant's line, it was backstage at Hammersmith I think, after a Rainbow show. Robert was there and this girl came up to him and he simply said 'Have we fucked?' That's the epitome of 'Rock Star' right there!"

Turner has endured his fair share of critics over the years, but his age-defying performances on the pulsating 'Get Back My Crown' and the soaring 'You Are The Music' are superb.

"My wife was the inspiration for 'You Are The Music'. A Russian friend of ours died, and then came back to life. He lived for quite a few months, then he had an aneurism and died again. Crazy! We wanted to write a song as a gift to his family. My Swedish friends came up with the track and we worked on the lyrics together. They put in some brilliant things and it came out great. I don't mind saying those notes toward the end were a reach, but I got 'em. There's no tricks on this record. I did look at changing the key of the song but it didn't work as well. It went through about three incarnations, we changed the tempo of it and finally got the groove right. Then it was down to me to go in and try and nail it at the end. That was pure will and sheer fear of not doing it right! I'm really proud it came out so well.

"We're getting great reviews, which I'm really excited about. I've seen reviews using words like 'phenomenal' or 'album of the year'. I'm not trying to brag… well, maybe just a little!" he laughs. "I just think we can go up against anyone out there, because there was nothing on there that we didn't do, no secret overdubs or trickery, just five guys playing their asses off, old school. We've been pleasantly surprised about how people have received it. Oh, there was one comment, before any music had been put out. It was a news item about the band and who was in it, nothing more. Somebody commented 'I don't know why but I think this is gonna suck.' That's one of my big problems with the internet, the negativity. These twats with a keyboard, morons given a voice. I'm not expecting everybody to like it, but why does someone feel the need to go online and post a hateful or negative comment to something they've not even heard? I shouldn't get mad at them, but we went through hell putting this thing together and it was like delivering a baby. It was laborious but we're so proud. The first time I heard it played back, I thought it was a damn good record and I think it's a grower, it improves every time you play it."

The inclusion of a track called 'Stranger In Us All' could be mistaken for a nod to Rainbow, but it turns out that wasn't down to Turner.

"Actually, it was Tony who came in with the words to 'Stranger In Us All'. Alessandro had written the track and it had a different title and lyrics. Tony came up with a new set of lyrics about the evil side within each of us and he called it 'Stranger In Us All'. I thought it was a much stronger concept, I liked the idea of saying you never really know people, you never really know what you are capable of."

Once everything had come together musically, then there was the small matter of what to call the band.

"We thought about the name Legacy – only to find all these shithouse bands already using that name. Most of them were covering our old stuff!" Turner laughs. "I said 'Guys, we're all ex-members of bands, we all have ex-wives, we've led X-rated lives – what about Rated X?' Tony said 'Yeah, but if you look up that, all you get is porno sites.' I said 'And?' We're rock 'n' roll, sex goes well with that, remember! Tony's wife said 'And your next album can be called 'X-posed!' It was great! I also thought it was a merchandising ploy. I love the cover, I think that will make for a great looking t-shirt. Who doesn't want to be a bit naughty, to be Rated X?"

Rated X is out now on Frontiers Records.

SHADES & PETERS

Rene Shades (Pretty Maids) and Martie Peters (Push) collaborated to produce 'Let The Record Spin' (see review in Issue 66) which has turned out to be one of the feel-good albums of the year. Mark Donnelly got the opportunity to ask the great Danes about the album.

May I start by congratulating you both on the release of 'Let The Record Spin'?

Rene Shades: Hi Mark, thank you so much, we really appreciate all the kind words. This has been a joyful ride to do this album and a bit of an adventure. There was a mantra from the beginning: "Anything is possible". And one thing just led to another. So we are really happy that, for the most part, people like what we came up with.

Martie Peters: Thank you Mark, we are totally blown away by the reception of the album so far!

I understand that you have been friends since childhood and were in your first band together. What type of music did you play when you first started?

RS: Well at first we just played football (soccer) but then we got out an old guitar having listened to Dylan, Bryan Adams and Rod Stewart and also bands like Honeymoon Suite and actually Pretty Maids. Then later on I got really into Gary Moore, Kiss, Thin Lizzy etc… So really it was a mix match of all those genres and musical influences. We had no idea what we were playing and just tried to mix it all up. We learned a lot in those days; it was pure fun.

MP: That's true, we played football together when we were kids. We started as a cover band when we were in high school; we played everything from Rod Stewart and Springsteen to Gary Moore. Then the Glam scene hit and we jumped on the bandwagon with long hair and makeup (laughs). We formed our own band, Sateria, performing our own material and we opened for some pretty big names in Copenhagen in 1992. Not many people know this but we came pretty close to signing with a major label but then Grunge arrived and everyone forgot about us… we split and went our different ways, more or less.

Was it always your ambition to get together in the future and record an album?

RS: I think that idea came about when Martie approached me to play guitar on one of his solo records. So I said yes and played on two songs and one thing slowly led to another. I guess it was a rekindled old friendship. We hadn't seen much of each other in several years but we know each other so well that it was pretty much like coming back to work on a Monday after the weekend.

MP: When we bumped into each other at parties or concerts we would always talk about doing something together again. Then in 2005 Shades played guitar on two tracks on my Martie Peters Group album. After that he would always say to me, "Let me produce the album you've always dreamt of releasing – a proper Rock/Pop album". So Shades & Peters really started out as Shades producing my album but pretty quickly it became obvious to both of us that this was something more than just a solo album for me. The duo idea was born and we both felt really good about it.

The music on 'Let The Record Spin' is quite different from that of your main bands Pretty Maids and Push. Have you always been fans of AOR and Country?

RS: Yeah. I remember getting out my parents records and I always listened to The Beatles 'For Sale' album and they had some Kenny Rogers stuff. So I guess I got a lot of English and American influences early on. I think there was some Ray Charles and Rod Stewart albums in there as well. But I seriously got hooked on Elvis when I was 6. And you can safely say he covered many genres; still The King. I always like stuff with a melody whether it be soft, or hard as hell, but melody counts.

MP: It probably sounds a bit like a cliché but to me there are only two types of music: music I like and music I don't like. I couldn't care less about genres or labelling the music as this or that - it's all about the quality of the songs.

How did you manage to get so many legendary, guest musicians to appear on the album and did you get to meet any of them in person or was all of the album recorded over the Internet?

RS: I really have to give Martie credit for that idea. He just wanted some of his heroes from Rod's old band on there. So he scouted the Internet and got Jim Cregan on board. I thought it was a great idea and when one guy heard the other was on the record then it was easier for them to say yes. Mickey Curry from Bryan Adams' band just said yes because he liked the music and so he got Keith Scott on board. And yeah sure we got to hang out with some of them and play with them. Mickey is very kind to always invite us to Bryan's shows and Jimmy Z came to play shows with us and I think we can safely say we are friends. We do talk and see each other from time to time. It's very surreal to play and befriend people you grew up learning from but freaking amazing when they turn out to be such great people.

MP: It is no secret that I am big Rod Stewart fan and over the years I have played at fan conventions in the UK so I have gotten to know some people who were really close to Rod and his band. A friend of mine in the UK, who had heard a demo of 'The Balcony', suggested that I should contact Jim Cregan and ask him if he wanted to play on the album. I sent him an email and a couple of days later we were talking on the phone about the album; he agreed and the rest is history. Once he was on board I guess it paved the way for the other guys to jump on too.

The album was recorded in studios all over the World, but unfortunately our finances didn't allow us to spend time in the studio with the guys. We have met Mickey Curry on several occasions when he's toured Europe with Bryan Adams and Jimmy Z toured with us in Germany in 2012.

I noticed that you wrote several songs individually and with co-writers,

however, there is a real consistency in the song writing; even the two covers seem to fit seamlessly into the album. Is that the reason that these two songs were chosen? Were any other covers considered?

RS: We tried to cover aspects from honkey-tonk Rock to modern Country ballads but I'm glad you think there is a consistency. We tried many covers from Tom Petty, other Rod tracks, Springsteen but these two won eventually. As for the songwriting, we had at least thirty-forty songs and many never made it to the final cut.

MP: It's been a long creative process and the songs that are on the album are basically the songs we thought should be there. We did record a bunch of other material along the way, both original and covers. We tried Springsteen's 'I'm On Fire' and Rod's 'The Killing Of Georgie'.

We both felt that we should have a cover or two on the album as a tribute to some of our musical heroes and that's why we ended up doing 'What's It Gonna Be' and 'Young Turks'. At the same time we wanted our versions to be something special, different from the originals, why else record them?

What are your favourite songs from the album?

RS: Very hard to say. I'm not that objective about it as I both mixed and produced it so I listened to it so many times during that period. I hear it as small pieces here and there or as instrumentation so cannot completely get away from the "producer" role. Also, I tend to change my opinion on what I like most. I'm really proud of what we accomplished with actually very little means. But right now I think I like 'We Drove All Night Long' the most. Maybe something else tomorrow?

MP: It's hard to pick one or two songs but hard pressed I'd say 'The Balcony' and 'Remember'.

Have you any plans to tour the album together?

RS: Yes, definitely. We just played a show in Copenhagen and we are booking shows in Denmark, Germany down through some of Europe and hopefully the UK.

MP: Yes! The tour starts in February 2015. I can't wait to hit the road, as much as I like being in the studio, concerts is what it's all about for me!

Is this a one off project or have you plans to record another album together?

RS: I think we both see it as an ongoing thing, not just a project. I think we have at least another one in us,

MP: It is definitely not a one off! We are writing new material as we speak and the plan is to build on the great reception we have received.

Rene, I must ask how much did you enjoy your recent show at Firefest? You certainly were energetic and I would say only Erik Grönwall of H.e.a.t covered more distance on stage. I thought that it was a fantastic performance (see my review further on in this issue).

RS: Thank you Mark. We all had a great time at Firefest, great atmosphere. Guess I have to run around more to get to Erik's level! Also very cool that a young band like H.e.a.t are doing so well in this business nowadays. It's not an easy thing to do, so power to them.

Rene and Martie, have you anything else that you would like to say?

RS: Well first of all thanks to you Mark and Fireworks and I guess I can only say get our Album and come see a show. We know in these crisis times that everyone can use a bit of positive energy and music is just the cure, it helps the soul. Also, no one ever forgets good concert so go see a show and support your bands. They need you as much as you need them. Shades and Peters need you too… so hopefully see you out there. It's worth leaving the sofa for!

MP: Thank you for the support, so far, to you and the magazine. And to the record buying audience I just want to say this: Don't be shy now, get yourself a copy of 'Let The Record Spin' before your neighbour! Hopefully we'll see you all out there on the road in 2015!!

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Brace yourself, it's a New Wave of Hellenic Melodic Rock coming! Well, maybe not a wave (not yet, perhaps), but there are some really promising acts from Greece appearing at the scene and one of them is Wild Rose. 2014 saw the return of the talented quintet, their trademarks being solid dose of '80s-style, perfectly crafted AOR as well as the album covers graced by a scantily clad lady and the automobile (here we go again...'87 style!). And although the title of their third album reads 'Hit 'N'Run', it was no hit-and-run kind of thing as the band's keyboard player Dirty Haris discussed the details of the album with Alexandra Mrozowska.

You've released a new album just a year and a half after the previous one; for some bands it's way too fast! Weren't you tempted to give yourselves some time off?

We don't actually plan when we will release our next album. Whenever we have a lot of ideas we gather for a week or a couple of weeks and bring them together. If the outcome is satisfactory, we then start to work on the songs to produce the next album. It's not like we work because we "have to" produce our next album. It just goes with the flow. That week that the band comes together, *that's* our time off. That's when we actually relax doing what we love the most.

What are your expectations, and what is the feedback from the critics and the listeners so far?

Our expectations are quite simple as with every album – sold out in about a year. We always like to exceed our label's expectations! (laughs) The feedback we're getting is quite interesting as there is a big disagreement as half the critics are about us having the same sound and the other half explaining how our sound has progressed. The listener's general opinion is that this is a very good and "as expected" album. To be honest, it's the listener's opinion I care about, after all, those are the ones we're composing music for and the ones that support our music for so many years, not the critics.

Do you see the new album as the continuity of the style Wild Rose embarked on since the very beginning, or perhaps, an evolution for the band?

I think our music does evolve, every day we learn something new about music, listen to a new Rock band, listen even to a non-Rock song that will somehow influence us. That influence is usually reflected on composition. I would like to think that while the the sound of the band evolves, we continue to have our original identity, at least a great part of it.

What do you think are the highlights of 'Hit 'N' Run'? Any favourites?

Honestly, no. I can't distinguish between them. Every piece has its own unique magic and I can't really say some of them are my favorites. I know the fans' favorite is "Through The Night", but that was quite expected since we shot a music video for it. It is also rather interesting that according to the country, the favorite listener's song changes.

Music-wise, were the inspirations for 'Hit 'N' Run' any different than before?

Music-wise... they were pretty much the same! Like 90% same and another 10% maybe came from somewhere else that nobody talks about and won't share even with his band mates... (laughs). No, our inspirations come from the heart of the '80s Melodic Rock. I'd like to have some musical inspirations from today's bands but nobody plays that '80s rock anymore. It's a mixture of sophisticated and Modern Rock, which doesn't really sound like Melodic Rock anymore.

Your lyrics evolve largely around romantic relationships. Where do you usually get your inspirations from?

Real life! Science fiction takes a lot of effort doesn't it? (laughs) It's very easy to write lyrics when you're emotionally involved in a situation, or even experiencing a love story. Sometimes I do write lyrics about the past, but remembering how that made you feel makes it a lot easier to keep writing.

What is the songwriting process for Wild Rose?

The fun part! Whenever we think that we have plenty of ideas that could become songs, we plan a grand meeting which lasts for at least a week. The everyday sessions involve a lot of food and alcohol and perhaps the first days have nothing to do with songwriting. So we bring our ideas together and start mini-arranging songs and making demos when we're happy with the arranging. When we've gone through all of the ideas and there's no more demos to be made, we just go on eating and drinking! The recording and production phases are all work and no play and last for much longer than a week, so we might just have a lot of fun in that one!

Now many bands refer stylistically to what was AOR/Melodic Rock in the '80s while maintaining the thick contemporary production so as to enhance their sound. What do you think about the changes that happened within the genre?

I believe that there are some companies that like to sell a lot, so since they have the majority of famous AOR musicians signed, they make them play crap today (and still call it AOR) and still sell and then they make their new bands play the new kind of crap that famous AOR musicians made, so that they sell as well. I'll tell you one thing. At least 50% of the bands that say they play AOR, don't. They play a degenerated kind of something close to Melodic Rock while following the new music fashion. Just play a great '80s album and then play a new band's (supposed AOR) album. It's like "find the similarities" game. Is it AOR? No! On the other hand there are some bands that play great AOR without trying to do something progressive with it, just having their "new" sound and identity. They also play in the year 2014 but they sound like AOR. Those are the kind I really admire.

What are your plans concerning the promotion of the new album? Any tour in the pipeline?

David and myself are in the UK, so it's a bit hard to plan a tour. We'd play anywhere we were invited though.

Is there anything you'd like to add in the end?

I'd like to salute the all the fans of AOR, and especially the Wild Rose fans!

US based band The SixxiS have a new album, 'Hollow Shrine', out landed a support slot on Spock's Beard's European Tour so things are certainly looking up for them. Gary Marshall hooked up with the band for some insight, albeit struggling to identify which band member was speaking at any given time.

As a new name to many Fireworks readers, can you give us some background on the band, how you got together, when and where?

We started out as a project a long time ago while Vladdy (Iskhakov – lead vocals, guitar, violin, piano & synth) was still in college and took quite a while to get to where it is now. At first it was not really intended to be something serious, but the more things progressed, the more it became increasingly important and the momentum kept on going until we were a proper band. As with a lot of bands there were quite a few member changes that happened along the way and things didn't really progress until we solidified our line-up in around 2011. You could look at this period as one of preparation and development and that helped us focus more on our craft and consequently we were able to really dig in and establish the sound of the band so that when we got our opportunity we were prepared and ready.

All the musicians that are a part of this band were recommended by other musician friends who were familiar with the project and knew what was going on. We think the development of this band has been a very long and interesting story; every gut wrenching twist and turn only brought us to bigger and better things.

Have you all performed in other bands prior to The SixxiS?

Yes. All of us have other projects we are involved with when we are not on the road or in the studio. But the Sixxis is the main band for each of us now.

Where does the band's name derive from?

The day that the original members of The SixxiS got together happened to be June 6th 2006 (06/06/06). When one of the guys noticed this we decided to go with it as our name. We also thought it was pretty cool when it came to the logo as the name is reversible.

How would you describe your sound and style to someone who may not have heard you yet?

That's a tough question to answer. We all agree that it's an original sound that has blends of many different elements stemming for the Grunge era, bands like Soundgarden and Alice in Chains, and other bands such as System of a Down, Rush and Muse. If it had to be classified, it would probably be "Progressive Grunge", to a certain extent.

Who are the main songwriters, or are the compositions a collaboration?

Vladdy generally writes the skeletal structure of the song along with lyrics, riffs and chord changes; after that everyone gets a chance to hear it and we start building the overall sound of the song together as a band.

Your individual biographies on the web site indicate a diverse range of influences. Do you think that has had a significant impact on your sound?

Absolutely! Our sound would not be what it is if it was not for the diverse influences we all have. It only adds more to our overall sound. This is definitely what makes this band unique in our minds. The songwriting process becomes really good fun because of all the different ideas and variations that we can come up with and utilize in our songs.

It would appear that you have an influential ally in Mike Portnoy, what with support slots with The Winery Dogs and his Progressive Nation Cruise; has his support been as proactive as it would seem?

Our tour with The Winery Dogs was viewed as such a long shot at first. Our Manager, Rob Palmen, knew Mike from previous projects, and pitched our music to him to see if he'd be interested. The following week we got word that Mike really enjoyed what he'd heard and would love to have us on board with them for the tour. Having support from someone like Mike Portnoy is definitely a huge plus for any band in our position.

How did the tour support and cruise work out for you guys, did they go well?

Both the tour and the cruise went really well. Mike, Billy (Sheehan) and Richie (Kotzen) are all amazing musicians and a really great bunch of guys. We all definitely learned lots of things just watching them play every night and just being around them watching their professionalism. It raised the bar for us and increased the level of how we needed to perform night in and night out.

What's next for The SixxiS?

Hopefully more and more touring and also some festivals. We hope to make our shows bigger musically with more instruments added to the mix. We should be back in the studio at the end of 2015 to record a new album. We already have lots of good ideas for new songs.

HAREM SCAREM

Toronto natives Harem Scarem have always been one of the most popular bands in the Melodic Rock genre due to their rich and varied back catalogue, so it came as a bit of a shock when they announced their split after their twelfth studio album 'Hope' in 2008. With all members remaining active in the music business, founder members Harry Hess (vocals) and Pete Lesperance (guitars) hatched a plan to celebrate twenty years of their classic second album, 'Mood Swings', by re-recording it and touring parts of North America, Europe and Asia, with original drummer Darren Smith helping to make it authentic. The reaction was so positive that they had no choice but to write and record a new album, the thoroughly excellent 'Thirteen'. Harry Hess tells Phil Ashcroft why the band have recently been rejuvenated.

What happened in the years you were inactive to make you want to make another album?

You know what? It wasn't actually until we got out on the road and started playing, and talking to fans and seeing how excited they were to be seeing us, I think it really influenced us. After re-recording 'Mood Swings' and getting out there it was a really positive feeling we were getting, so many people said it would be great if we continued. So when we got back we thought about writing some new songs, and after we'd spent some time throwing around ideas, we felt we had something strong enough to warrant us coming back and making another record.

We didn't really know what to expect when we started talking to people about doing dates, and the invitation to come to Firefest was really the cornerstone of the whole idea, so it grew from there very quickly. Surprisingly the shows were very well attended in Europe, and obviously in Japan it wasn't a shock that people wanted to see us *there*, we've always done really well there and have always had a really great live following. It was more Europe where we were surprised that people were still interested.

Why did you decide to re-record 'Mood Swings'?

What it really came down to was, if we were going to do the whole celebration of the twenty year anniversary thing, us not owning the rights to the 'Mood Swings' recording put us in a situation where we wouldn't be able to do anything, we wouldn't have anything to sell, and if it was just the same product it wouldn't have made a lot of sense either. We first started thinking about maybe remixing or re-mastering it, or maybe we'd do some bonus tracks, but then the bonus tracks couldn't go with the originals because we don't own them. After chatting about it we decided that the easiest solution was just to re-record it, then we could do whatever we wanted with it and we kinda liked the idea of taking back ownership of what was probably our most important record. Getting in and re-doing the songs was a lot of work but also a lot of fun too and a challenge for us to see if we could recreate it again twenty years later. All those factors came together and made us want to try, but after we started it, it turned out to be a mountain of work, that's for sure! (laughs)

Did you approach the new album any differently from how you used to work?

I think we were heavily influenced by being back in the headspace of re-recording 'Mood Swings'' to be honest, and going out and playing those songs put that in the forefront of what we were doing musically again. It definitely influenced the thought process when we were writing the songs but I think this record sounds different to me in regard of ideas, but in comparison to our last record, 'Hope', this is really what Pete and I like about Harem Scarem and what we think the fans like about us. We approached it the same way from a recording perspective but in terms of the ideas you're working on and what those songs need and how you're going to treat them, coming off the 'Mood Swings' experience definitely sneaked into our subconscious.

When you're writing are you constantly aware of what you think the fans will want?

After all this time it comes down to this. We have to like something first to want to continue working on it and more importantly we've discovered what we do best and how it's going to translate. We're aware of people's reactions but that's always after the fact, so all we can do is think about what people think we are and what they like about what we do. If I were to break it down I'd say that people who like Harem Scarem like Pete's guitar playing and songs that are based on guitar riffs, but they have to have big, sing-along choruses and a lot of our fans like uplifting stuff with

major chords and they're not so in love with some of the darker stuff we've done in the past. So, we're conscious of it – not that we want any record we make to be one dimensional – so we walk the line of having all those elements within a record. It changes from song to song, even on this new record, a song like 'Garden Of Eden' is very different from the last song on the record, 'Stardust'. There are some darker elements in some parts of the songs but it always gets to a place where it's hopeful and uplifting sounding, and that mix for us is kind of a winning combination.

Is getting the right mix of the dark and light elements becoming harder or easier to reach as your career goes on?

It's getting harder because of the sheer number of times we've done it, hopefully without repeating ourselves. How many guitar riffs can you come up with that don't sound something like another guitar riff you came up with? (laughs) There are only so many chords and combinations that make sense musically, so you're working in a particular key, you work out a riff and you want the chorus to do that big chorus thing. Over the years, just on the thirteen records and an average of ten songs per record, there's a hundred and thirty songs right there, and we've done way more as bonus tracks and extra things, and then add other people's records that we've worked on and written for to those and we're in the hundreds easily. The thing that people don't want you to do is move on and become a different person, but ironically if you do move on and become a different person, that sort of wipes the slate and lets you begin again. Us being able to do that and move on to different things has definitely been necessary for us, the five years we didn't have to think about writing Harem Scarem songs has enabled us to come back into this with a fresh outlook and make this record. I think we would have been overwhelmed by the task if we'd had to carry on making a record every year without a break. I guess we've been fortunate enough to be able to change direction – although I guess some people weren't happy we did that – but it enabled us to keep searching and be engaged as song-writers and also gave us new directions to go into that we hadn't trod a million times before.

I think now we're in the comfortable position of understanding what people expect from a Harem Scarem record, including ourselves. I think we know pretty quickly what isn't going to work for us, so we'll save that for something else if it's going too far off what we think is a Harem Scarem song. I think this record is the essence of what you would expect from us, I don't think anyone will be shocked or disappointed by it and we hope they like the songs. We pride ourselves on working hard on the songs and I think these are as good as anything we've done.

Pete and yourself have done a lot of studio work in recent years, so has the way you record changed at all since you started producing yourselves?

Yes, I think so. If you know what you're doing you can work at home on a laptop a lot. We still go the traditional route when recording records. We'll record drums, then bass, then rhythm guitars, and I'll go off and do the vocals, sometimes at home and sometimes in the studio, and Pete will go and do guitars in his studio. We do the basic tracks together but we split up for the overdubs, whereas before we would both be together in the studio until the whole thing was finished. That's typically been the process for the last seven or eight records since digital has been our preferred way to record.

Do you and Pete ever disagree about the work you've done separately?

No, that's becoming very rare. We actually joke about it because a lot of the time he doesn't have any idea what I'm going to sing on top of a lot of his ideas. When I hear the music ideas that he gives me - riffs and things like that - for the most part I like to make exactly what he's given me work. I'd rather not change things and work with what he's given because I like the challenge of it, it's different to the old way where we would work things out together in the same room and get together and plan what we were going to do in detail. On this record there were some songs that were complete musical ideas that Pete sent to me, so I just told him to leave them with me and I added other parts that were completely different, like 'Early Warning Signs', which is a bit of a shock if you don't know what's going to happen, I just dropped melodies and a chorus on top of it. He says himself that he's shocked sometimes at what direction it went in, but in terms of guitar parts it's very, very rare that I'll even mention anything anymore because he knows what he's doing, and I know what I'm doing too so the roles that we play within Harem Scarem have become well defined.

'Thirteen' is a short album by today's standards, do you think albums are generally too long now?

It's actually more of a song structure thing for us, we've always written more like Pop song-writers where the songs are shorter than a lot of Rock bands. We don't like extended parts that we don't feel are necessary, you'll never hear a third verse out of us! (laughs) We'll only put in bridges if we think they're absolutely necessary. Middle eights and extended solos, we've always thought that they were, not amateurish song-writing as such, but a little bit down the road of "look at me!" We've never really loved that aspect of Progressive Rock where it just goes on too long, so we're definitely more Pop song-writers in terms of the structure of the songs. Also, when we get past song ten or eleven I really think we start repeating ourselves. I'd really like someone to play me a record where all fourteen or fifteen songs are really fantastic and they're all unique and different enough that they deserve to be there, and you wouldn't want to take one off. I can't think of one, even my favourite records.

I think some fans have been a bit confused about the drumming situation, with Creighton (Doane) doing the album and Darren (Smith) doing the last tour.

Just to clarify, Creighton never quit the band and has never asked to leave, Creighton couldn't do the 'Mood Swings' tour for other commitments that he'd made. It was going to be fine in the beginning, but as the tour grew and turned into something way more than we originally planned, the schedules began to overlap, so our obvious choice was to get Darren. We knew even then that Darren had committed to Red Dragon Cartel and they had a lot of dates that have only just finished now actually. It was great to get Darren back and do the tour but we already knew he was busy immediately after that and for the foreseeable future. At that time we didn't know that we were going to make a record or not, so when that was decided it seemed obvious to go back to using Creighton in the studio, we'd been doing that for over fifteen years and there's no-one better in the studio than Creighton, he's an amazing drummer and a great studio musician. We wanted to include Darren in the project, his voice is a really big part of the backing vocals and the sound of the choruses of Harem Scarem, so we knew 100% that we wanted him involved. As things stand, Darren and Creighton are both busy men, so once we finalise touring plans, we'll probably do some dates around March, April, May next year, so we'll have to see how things stand. We'll have to have a discussion soon about how things will go with regards to a live line-up.

How useful has the Pledge Music system been for you?

It's been great, we approached it as an add-on and not a replacement. I wouldn't have been as happy to make it part of this record if it were the only thing we were doing. We're still with Frontiers and we're still with Marquee/Avalon in Asia, so it's still business as usual with the conventional release, you can get the record how you've always bought the record or download the CD through iTunes, but the Pledge was all about offering something to the fans that they couldn't get through the traditional route, so it includes signed CD's, t-shirts, vinyl and things of that nature. We're doing a listening party this week for people who pledged to come down to the studio and hear the record before it's released, so it's really been great for connecting us with the fans directly.

Finally, we're sorry that your usual UK date won't be happening, you'll have to find somewhere else to play!

Yeah, we've been talking about that, the UK will definitely be on our itinerary. Firefest was always absolutely amazing and we always had a great time, it was one of the best attended festivals around and it will be sadly missed. But you're right, we probably won't find anything as great as that, but we do intend to get out that way and people will be able to come and see us, somehow!

'Thirteen' was released on December 5th by Frontiers Records

Swiss band Khaøs, fronted by American singer Chandler Mogel of Outloud have delivered a terrific debut album that combines the melodic rock that Mogel is renowned for with a tougher, more contemporary edge. Duncan Jamieson found out more about the band from Chandler and guitarist Mark Rossi.

How did a group of Swiss musicians hook up with you?

Chandler: Well it so happens we had a mutual friend who connected us; Rolf Munkes (from the band Empire) who also owns Empire Studios in Germany. Mark was getting ready to record with him and asked him if he knew any singers. Rolf dropped my name and Mark was all up in my Facebook the same day.

We're familiar with Chandler from his work in Talon and Outloud. Can you tell the readers about the rest of the band?

Mark: Khaøs consists of Chandler Mogel on vocals, myself, Mark Rossi on guitar, Nic Angileri on bass and Trevor Franklin on drums. I formed this band back in mid 2012. I also write the majority of songs and took care of the album, video production and artwork design. You probably know Chandler Mogel as one of the hardest-working independent singers in rock and his recent work with Greek/US Melodic Rock band Outloud. Nic Angileri is just a musical monster! His credit list is longer than the Nile. Just to mention two names, he has played as a touring musician with Swiss rockers Gotthard and was for several years the bass player for Jorn Lande. Trevor Franklin is a young and talented Anglo/Swiss drummer with tour and studio experience. A nice combo!

Khaøs has managed to balance a melodic rock sound with a harder more modern approach. Was this your intention and what are the musical influences of the band? It sounds quite diverse.

Mark: Yes this was pretty much what I wanted to achieve with this band. Having a bunch of dynamic players you don't have to explain too much what they have to do (laughs). Diversity per se was not a goal we had to pursue come hell or high water. I think it's just here as a result of our different characters. Our roots are pretty various; they stretch from jazz to 70's rock, from hard rock to metal, the latter which is definitely our common denominator.

Why did you pick the moniker Khaøs?

Chandler: Khaøs just seemed to fit what our union was; coming together from afar and of course from different backgrounds and styles. That and of course that great things are all born out of chaos. The phonetic spelling was Mark's idea I believe! Now I always spell it that way referring to the band or not [laughs]!

Your EP that came out at the end of 2012 surprised a lot of people as it was quite a different direction for Chandler. How did you know he'd fit in so well?

Mark: Because he's a great singer above all and he really liked the material I think. He was a bit hesitant first to be really honest. Probably because of some of the darker moments this band can sometimes offer. But all in all the chemistry worked really well. The good vibe and fresh energy far outweighed his initial doubts.

A lot of bands' debut album feature some or all of their EP songs. Your debut is all new material and there's a big step up in terms of a cohesive band sound since the EP. How do you think you've developed since the EP?

Chandler: Thanks, that's our thoughts exactly. The EP is cool but sounded very much like a "project" and we needed a band. So we really worked on the chemistry in the studio (even though I was in the US, it can be done) and worked the songs to death until we knew we had something special. The songs really tie in well with one another and there is a definite cohesive sound throughout. Now the challenge will be to pull them off live!

How are the songs written?

Chandler: Most of the tracks started with a musical idea from Mark and he would send this to me and I would add lyrics and melodies, and arrange the music for the vocal. A couple songs I believe were actually started with a vocal melody idea and had the music subsequently worked around it. Once the songs were where we wanted them, we went into the studio.

Tell me about the recording process.

Mark: We've pre-produced all songs together this time. We worked out all melodies before entering the studio, this was a quite crucial decision because this gave us the opportunity to interact a bit more and strengthen our musical dialogue. And we've frequently spoken during the recording sessions using Skype, texting and phoning

regularly. So compared to what we did on 'Rising' it has definitely been a more intensive collaboration even if, once again, we didn't record the album all in the same room. After the EP experience we knew how to manage the distance issue a bit better and what we could accomplish together as band. The fact that we met in real life and filmed two video clips together has definitely helped to consolidate the band.

The lyrics cover social and personal issues. What are the stories behind the likes of 'Imagined Danger ' and 'The Breathing Room'?

Chandler: That's true. 'Imagined Danger' is pretty literal. My mom always said that most danger is imagined, and she was right! 'The Breathing Room' is one of those songs that the lyrics really just came together and sounded cool, but it was inspired by taking a "safe haven" or "sanctuary" type place and juxtaposing an opposite emotion over the top, like a sinister vibe, one you'd least expect in that vicinity. It sounds kind of odd but makes for a nice song I think. Sometimes there's no deep meaning at all – just good songwriting!

How did you end up on the MRR label?

Mark: MRR is our own label actually. Releasing the album on our own was an option we had from the beginning. We tried to shop the album first and proposed it to selected labels but for some reason it just didn't fit in with their scheduled release plans. Others just didn't reply or it took an extremely long time to get solid answers. So since we self-produced the whole album it wasn't unthinkable to bring it out ourselves. But, it was a hell of a lot of work to be honest! (laughs). Finally we were really lucky to get in touch with Plastichead and to work out a worldwide distribution deal with them. All ended well.

50% of sales of your previous EP 'Rising are going to the charity Love, Hope, Strength. Can you tell me more about that?

Mark: 50% is donated to the Mike Peters' foundation. The new album is not linked to that program though. I really like Mike Peters and his music and what he is doing with Love, Hope, Strength. I thought it might be a good opportunity to connect to his charity project and contribute to a good cause. There are too many people around us who are suffering or dying of all sorts of cancer every day. We just wanted to give our small sign. By the way 'Strength' is one of my favourite Mike Peters' songs, and I think that as a two times cancer survivor he is now stronger than ever, musically and as a human being. He never stopped playing music and accepted his fate as his mission, challenging himself and his audience through music. Hats off!

How does Chandler's commitment to Outloud interfere with Khaøs?

Chandler: It doesn't, not yet at least. Neither band is working on a full-time basis yet so scheduling can be done around one another pretty easily. Khaøs has just begun to start working on live gigs for 2015.

Will there be a chance to see Khaøs live?

Mark: On November 18th we are going to celebrate the release of our second video 'Exalted' here in Switzerland and will be playing a couple of songs as well. So if you want to see this band live immediately this might be the perfect occasion. Of course we would like to promote the whole album live next year and can't wait to get this band on tour and celebrate 2015 with a 'Risen' tour. Fingers crossed.

What's the next step for the band?

Chandler: The album was released on October 20th so we've been doing any and every promotional action to help with that. Then in November we are releasing our second video, for 'Exalted', as Mark just mentioned. Then we go forward and continue working on live dates for next year and getting our name out there in a big way. Thank you for your time and for helping us do just that!

Interview by Carl Buxton

Amaranthe have recently released their third album 'Massive Addictive' following on from 'The Nexus' last year and their self-titled debut in 2011, and in my humble opinion it's going to break them into the big league. I got to speak to bass player Johan Andreassen, who originated from the Swedish Punk and Grunge scene, during a week's break he was having in Atlanta whilst Jake, Olof and Elize were doing press in New York and he felt exactly the same way about it. For this new album they've recruited Henrik Englund on harsh vocals, replacing Andreas Solvestrom.

Olof Morck (guitarist), clean vocalist Jake E. Lundberg and soprano Elize Ryd are the predominant song writers - how much involvement did drummer Morten Lowe Sorensen and yourself have in the song writing and arranging process on the new album?

Jake, Olof and Elize, they are the ones, as you said, who write almost everything; lyrics and music and then when they have an idea ready for a song they'll send it to us and we can say what we think about it, or what we'd like to change, or what we don't like about it. We listen to everyone's opinions and then finally when we do the actual recording in the studio, we rearrange some parts and make it work, so the drum parts work for Morten, and my bass playing works out for the song. We're responsible for our own instruments, but Jake, Olof and Elize are the ones who write the foundations of the songs, and that seems to work out pretty good! (laughs)

So you can put your own individual stamp on the songs? I would imagine you jam the songs before you record them?

Would Olof specify what he wants from you or do you just go with what you feel?

When it comes to putting down the bass lines, I of course work a lot with Olof, almost exclusively because he's the guitar player and also the composer, but we always listen back to the songs at home by ourselves and I can sit and jam with the song and see what I think might work and what I think would be best for the song and then when we're in the studio, we always have a discussion about what to do and what not to do. We help each other out, but most of all do it in a way that makes it comfortable to play. Also, I'm a very old school kind of bass player - I don't want to do all this fancy stuff. I want the bass to be strong, and steady and just ongoing like a freight train in the background, so to speak.

Amaranthe are very different to bands in the Punk and Grunge scene, but do you still find fulfilment in what you do in Amaranthe compared to what you were doing before?

Yes I do. When it comes down it, it really doesn't matter what kind of music you play as long as you love playing it, and I love playing Amaranthe songs because the bass is very Punkish and straight on. So I think you have the Punk feel in the songs. Amaranthe is very far from Punk, but I think I bring some Punk attitude to the recordings, but most of all in the live shows. You could never get me to do any choreographics in the lives shows because I would forget and just get so into it and do whatever I feel like, I'd climb around and stage dive again, stuff like that. Actually I think that pretty much surprises people who come from a more Metal scene than what I do… there's actually a bass player who stage dives and does what he feels like. Some people say it takes up too much room on stage. (laughs)

Exactly. You have the Pop melodies like Abba, you have almost Swedish Folk music with the Pop sensibilities; with the melodic sound. You have the aggressive vocals; formally from Andreas, but now with Henrik and everything in between. It's a very interesting mix, which I think is quite unique.

Yes, if you take away the Poppy synthesisers and backing tracks and Jake and Elizes' vocals, you actually have a very dirty Death Metal band like Soilwork.

A friend of mine introduced me to your first album several years ago and I thought, "Wow, this is something quite different". I became a big Symphonic Metal fan about twelve years ago, but your sound was different and unique. Also, there's so much melody in Amaranthe.

There's a lot of Melodic Metal in our music; mostly because of Jake and Olof. When Olof composes, he thinks along the lines of classical music in terms of chord and harmonies. The bass is always classically influenced as to where to put the bass in the composition. There is a lot of Melodic Metal in our music, slightly different way than the more obvious way.

So Henrik Englund is with you now. Where did you find him and how does he fit in with the Amaranthe dynamic?

We have mutual friends and when Andy said he couldn't go on the Stratovarius tour with us we had to find a replacement, and because we had mutual friends we came across him fairly soon. We asked him if he wanted to do it and he was on board straight away. He stood in for Andy for that tour and also the American tour and when Andy finally left, the decision to take on Henrik - well there was no discussion what-so-ever. It just felt very natural to take him - he already knew the old songs, he fitted into the band extremely good. So it was a natural choice.

With the fans, they've not had the chance to hear the new album. How many songs will you be playing from it?

Right now this tour with Within Temptation, we played three new songs. That includes 'Drop Dead Cynical', that we released as a video, and also 'Trinity' and 'Digital World', which hasn't been released yet, but people seem to react really well to it.

What I like in that song is it's got a riff not dissimilar to Evanescence, but a very powerful riff and I think that's where you play some of your hardest bass, on that song.

Oh yes, I think I can say that on this album I physically play the bass as hard as I've ever done. My fingers were sore after the studio sessions. It's the Punk vibe.

'Digital World', 'Danger Zone' - very heavy - and 'Skyline' all have very powerful bass riffs. Very hard core rhythm on that one.

Oh yes. And then you have 'An Ordinary Abnormality'. That song is a very hard song as well. Fast and furious.

I'm interested to know how the fans reacted to 'Drop Dead Cynical'. For me, when I listened to the album, that was the strongest song that stood out for me.

They've been reacting really fucking good. We play it live, even though it hasn't been out that long people go really crazy. They sing along in the chorus and they react really fucking good to it. It's very surprising and very nice to see that. We actually managed to pull that off considering the song's only been out for a few weeks. They react just how they're supposed to.

Do you have a favourite song from the debut or 'The Nexus' album?

I'd say off the first album, I still love 'Hunger' very much because it's a very good live song and we get very good crowd reactions to that. And from 'The Nexus', 'The Nexus' is one amazing song, and also one of our absolute favourites to play live is 'Afterlife'.

Is there anything else you'd like to say to your fans Johan?

Just to say come to the shows, buy a T-shirt, buy the album, have as much fun as possible, enjoy the show and take care of each other.

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If you look back in time a little bit, you'd certainly remember there was an in-depth interview with Kruk in Fireworks as recently as three years ago; the band represented by its lead guitarist Piotr Brzychcy discussed their 'It Will Not Come Back' collaboration with Doogie White and their experience of supporting the likes of Deep Purple. Now in 2014 we have the band's fourth album, 'Before', and Alexandra Mrozowska caught up with the Polish band's current lead singer, Roman Kantoch.

It wasn't that long ago that you joined the band Kruk as their new lead singer. How does it feel to become a new voice of Kruk?

I've been familiar with Kruk for quite a few years. I followed the band and attended their gigs as often as I could. Actually I think we can speak about some kind of influence they exerted over me. I always thought highly of Tomasz Wisniewski (the band's previous singer) and I still consider him to be one of the best singers in Poland. He has a big vocal range and there's this characteristic timbre in his voice you recognise instantly. When I learnt about his departure from Kruk, I thought it may be worth a shot to try and join them.

Do you plan the collaboration with the band to be a long-term one?

It all depends on the band and their willingness to continue with me on board – or the lack of such (laughs). I certainly hope it will go on – if the atmosphere stays the same, I'm sure the guys won't get rid out of me too fast. Besides, there's no reason why I should plan otherwise. You never know what's going to happen, so we'll live and let live – but for now, we play together and that's what really matters. It feels really great.

This recent collaboration of yours and Kruk turned out to be pretty fruitful, judging by the album 'Before' which the band has just released with you on lead vocals. What do you think is the real value of the album music-wise?

When I joined the band the material for this album was already written and I wasn't able to hear any of the tracks until we started to work on my vocal lines. I have to admit I was quite surprised by what I heard – I didn't expect the band to go in such a direction, but my reaction was, "Okay, if that's how it's supposed to be now, a bit different and with a modern edge, I'm into it." The actual value of this music is not the merit of ours, but of our listeners. It's them who find the parts of themselves within the sounds and lyrics and who identify their experiences with ours; it's them who keep on giving the album a spin over and over again until they find it tinted with their own emotions. Music-wise, I think the album marks a nice departure from a run of the mill Hard Rock thing. It's a bit different from what the band has recorded before, but nevertheless as good as the rest of the band's discography.

The songwriters for this album were the band's guitarist and leader Piotr Brzychcy and his wife. Are you comfortable with performing songs you didn't write?

While working on particular tracks, I asked Piotr a lot of questions about the songs themselves – what was the message he wanted to convey, what were his feelings, his experiences. Then I kept on listening and thinking it over and over again. I strived to feel the music, to transform myself into the sounds I heard, and to incorporate it all into my vocals.

What do you think are the album's highlights, any favourite songs?

My favourites are 'My Sinners' because of its heaviness, 'Last Second' because of its modern edge and the kind of sound that is new for this particular band, and 'Wings Of Dreams', the Blues-flavoured track which reaches back to the genre that remains the primary source of Hard Rock music. The album's a solid one in its entirety and I'm not even trying to point to any weak points as it simply doesn't make much sense now. At first, I might have had my doubts and perhaps I did, but when we played the entire album from the first track to the last live, I realised the result is exactly what we attempted to achieve.

Just recently, you've made a music video that illustrates 'Last Second'. What prompted the choice of this particular track?

It's catchy and at the same time it conveys a pretty important message. Also, it revolves around the theme of bikes and bikers – isn't that the essential part of Hard Rock music? (laughs)

How important are the music videos now – in the days after MTV's demise, when the torch is being carried on by YouTube?

I think music videos are still the essential part of Rock music, or popular music in general. The role of MTV might have been taken over by the Internet, that is true – but it really doesn't matter and music videos are still being produced, one after another. This kind of visual presentation is still necessary and people still enjoy it, so it's only the means of conveying it that's changed. After all, it's still a great deal of fun to see your heroes in the video (laughs).

What are Kruk's plans for the future?

Gigs and after-show parties (laughs). We may prepare a new album soon. We may face new changes that will lift the band even higher towards the stars. Who knows? Let's hope our hard work will be rewarded.

Blitzkrieg, the New Wave of British Heavy Metal band who so influenced Metallica, have just released an album of archive material from the early days. Fireworks' Michael Anthony spoke with original and current Blitzkrieg vocalist Brian Ross for the lowdown on 'The Boys from Brazil Street'.

So Brian! 'The Boys from Brazil Street', what can you tell us?

It's a long, long time ago, and we're talking about a year between October 1980 and November 1981 when my address was 32 Brazil Street. It was a very large townhouse and we had spare rooms, so a couple of guys from the band moved in, including the manager. So that's the reason why 'The Boys from Brazil Street' – we lived there! Some of the songs on the album were recorded in sessions at Neat Records and we had such a great time recording them. It was great fun, and everything was possible. You felt like you could do anything, really.

The recordings do convey the vibe and excitement of the time.

They do. They're not perfect. But what they do is give you a snapshot of a moment in time, of the vitality and the sheer power that was Blitzkrieg back then. Jim [Sieroto, guitarist] was a huge Deep Purple and Led Zeppelin fan. And Ian Jones, the other guitar player, was a huge Judas Priest fan, and when you put the two together, that was the essence of the Blitzkrieg sound. You had the Blackmore virtuosity with the power of Priest, and it was exciting. It was magic, you know. And we felt like we were really doing something worthwhile.

You do wonder why things didn't move on to the next level for Blitzkrieg, like they did for Saxon or Maiden.

There's a very good reason why. What happened was that Freddie Cannon of Carrere Records, Saxon's label at the time, was in Leicester sorting out a gig for Saxon at the De Montford Hall. He went into the local record store –Revolver Records – to see if they'd put up a promotional display. The guy in the record store told him about Blitzkrieg and gave him a copy of the 'Buried Alive' single. Freddie went away and listened to it, and he loved it. He wanted to do a single and an album with us and he wanted us to support Saxon on the UK tour. He sent us a contract, we had it checked out, and, basically, we all signed except Jim. Jim had a very good wage as head of the science and computer department at a local school and when he thought about it, he was a little reluctant to give up his day job to go pro-musician. I'd already given up my job as had everyone else, but basically without Jim I didn't want to carry on. So we decided to split up and go our separate ways.

So, it could have been very different?

Yeah, it could have been so different if we'd signed, put out 'Too Wild to Tame' as the second single, put out 'A Time of Changes' – we already had the album name– and gone on tour with Saxon. We could have become quite big. I have no doubt about that. We'd already met Biff and the guys, and I'm still friends with Biff to this day. But what you've got to remember is that if that had happened then Satan [Brian's other band] would have been totally different. I believe, firmly, that everything happens for a reason and looking back on it, I don't regret anything apart from not having a Blitzkrieg reunion at some point before Ian died – it can never be done now, not with the original line-up, anyway. But really, we all make choices in our lives and you just have to go with it. I eventually did 'A Time of Changes' and Jim did appear on it, as did Mick Moore the bass player, so, you know, all things sort of come right in the end, I suppose.

'The Boys from Brazil Street' is subtitled 'The Archives Volume I'. Will there be a Volume II?

It was nothing to do with me initially. It was Jim, because Jim has a lot of the tapes. I do have material from later Blitzkrieg albums, but I think 'The Boys from Brazil Street' series should be kept for the original line-up and I think Jim agrees, so any material that's left lying around – and there are a few tracks – may well turn up on a Volume II.

I can see why Blitzkrieg fans want to hear those things. It's a piece of history, which I think is what they like. And I think all bands have that. I remember going to see a band when we played in Sheffield one night. It was Def Leppard! And at the time Def Leppard were so heavy, it was unbelievable. They were not the Def Leppard that put out 'Pyromania'. They were much, much heavier, very much bump and grind British Metal, and they were fantastic. I've still got the demo cassette they gave me. And I've still got the original 'No Life 'Til Leather' one that Metallica sent me back then too.

Stylistically, I think you can hear a strong influence on Metallica's early material.

A lot of people have said that. And it's a shame, from that angle, that although they used to do 'Armageddon' as well, they only ever recorded one Blitzkrieg song. But yeah, when you listen to the early Metallica albums you can hear a Blitzkrieg influence and that's really cool. It's nice to influence anybody, whether they're famous or just starting out. As a musician it's nice to be able to think, yeah, I've done something right.

I reviewed Blitzkrieg's 'Back From Hell' album and really enjoyed it [Issue 61]. Do you want to say something about what the band are up to at the moment?

We enjoyed working on the 'Back From Hell' album. I think the vitality that was there in the early days comes across on that album. We tried to return to the roots of the band and recapture the thing that made Blitzkrieg what it was. We're rehearsing for the thirtieth anniversary shows in which we're playing 'A Time of Changes' in its entirety and doing other songs that we haven't played for a long time or have never played live. And we're going to be writing songs for a new album.

I'm also rehearsing for a special one-off cancer charity show in South Shields. Someone got in touch and asked if I'd like to play Alice Cooper in a stage show for a night, with all the props and everything. If it goes well, we may actually take it out on tour. I don't know. Obviously Blitzkrieg is always paramount in my mind, followed very closely by Satan, with whom I'm about to record a new album.

There will be plenty of opportunities coming up to catch Blitzkrieg and Satan live. And can I wish Blitzkrieg and Satan fans a very merry Christmas and a happy new year!

Swedish Melodic Metal stalwarts Bloodbound are back with their strongest album yet, entitled 'Stormborn'. Ian Johnson talks with the band's keyboard player Fredrik Bergh, about song titles, where the band gets its inspiration from, creepy children's choirs and why he's an old AOR softy at heart.

The new songs all have big memorable choruses that you can sing along to almost as soon as you hear them. Was this what you were aiming for?

We worked really hard to make this album sound good but no, we didn't sit down with writing songs like that in mind. Actually, what happened was that we've been touring a lot in support of the last album and we came to know what a live audience liked about our music, the tempos, the reactions they gave us, what got them going and singing when we played. So the songs were actually written with a live setting in mind and how to get a crowd excited.

The songs also have some great titles like 'Satanic Panic', 'We Raise The Dead', 'Seven Hells'. So what comes first, the title or the music?

The main song writers are myself and Tomas Olsson. So he might have a title in his head which he then tries to write a song or music around, then we develop the melodies and the basic structure of the song. I usually write the melodies and harmony parts first, as I'm a keyboard player I leave the riffs to Tomas. He adds the riffs on guitar, he's the riff king! Then we work on the vocal melodies and next comes the lyrics. Tomas and I co-wrote a lot of the stuff together on 'Stormborn' and we work well as a team I think.

Where do you get your song ideas from?

On this album, Tomas is a great big fan of Game Of Thrones, he used a lot of that imagery in the songs. Myself, I just tried to write some evil sounding Metal (laughs), though it is really important that the lyrics are right for the melodies you've written. If the lyrics don't work, the song won't either. That's because I think that the words used in songs are music too.

I noticed on the album that a lot of the songs have Celtic sounding instruments on them.

It was me that brought all the Irish influences in to the new songs. I'm a big fan of Nightwish and love that they now have a pipe player in the band. At first when I wrote the songs/lyrics I didn't have the pipes in mind for them but when I started to write the melodies and harmonies this sound just came to mind. I always loved the way Thin Lizzy and Gary Moore had that Irish feel to their music. So I thought it might be cool to add pipe melodies here and there and have them join in with Tomas when he played the guitar harmony parts. I think it really turned out cool.

You also have used lots of multi-layered vocal harmony parts, lots of choirs on the new album which gives the songs an epic feel.

Yes, we wanted that bombastic sound to the vocals. I arranged all of that myself and it was a big job to fit all those vocal harmonies into the songs and make it sound right. You need a lot of voices if you want your songs to sound BIG! Though a lot of the vocals are keyboard samples that I play; especially the big male choir parts.

On 'Nightmares From The Grave' you have a children's choir helping out at the end of the song…

Well that came about while I was writing the lyrics for the song. I had an idea that the song had a Freddy, 'Nightmare On Elm Street', scary kids song feel to it, you know. I wanted the song to have that weird nursery rhyme feel to it and I always think that, used in the right way, children's voices sound a little creepy. When I added in the music box and Church organ, then it all came together as a song.

You must be pleased with how things are going for Bloodbound, having a stable line-up for the last three albums?

We are. Patrik (Johansson), our singer, is sounding amazing and Tomas and the other guys are all brilliant as well. We're a really tight unit, really solid as performers and we're really enjoying doing what we're doing, which always makes the music that you play and write sound better.

The new album sounds amazing - who produced it?

We did the production and recorded our various parts in our own homes, except for the drums but and I'm sure you've been told this before by other musicians, that what makes an album sound good is the mix. We wanted a great mix for this album and we always liked the mixes that Sabaton got on their albums, which always sound amazing. So we asked their guy, Jonas Kjellgren is his name, to mix our album and he's done an amazing job. We all think the album sounds great. It's big and bombastic, just what a Metal album should sound like.

A bit off topic Fredrik but I'm a fan of your AOR project Street Talk. Anything like that in the pipeline for the future?

I'm still friends with everyone in that band and I love writing songs in the AOR way but Street Talk never played live. At the moment the budgets you get for those kind of things are so small that I couldn't afford to take the time needed away from Bloodbound to make another AOR record. The last Street Talk album I think was a great album but I don't want to skimp on the quality of a project because AOR has to sound a certain way. You have to spend time and money on getting it right. I'm still active in AOR though, I have a new song on the Revolution Saints album, I've written songs with Steve Augeri, Steve Overland and Rob Moratti, so I'm keeping my hand in because I do love AOR a lot. I'm not an all-out Metal guy, I love a wide range of music. So if I can write AOR songs for other artists, then I get the best of both worlds.

One of my biggest regrets is that I never got over to a Firefest, which I've heard nothing but good things about.

harmony

Sweden's Harmony return after almost four years missing in action, their new album a fantastic mix of Progressive Metal and Hard Rock. Ian Johnson talks with the band's guitarist Markus Sigfridsson about the new CD, their new singer and why it's taken so long to record 'Theatre of Redemption'.

This is your third album to date but why, if you don't mind me asking, has it taken you four to five years to record each of your albums? You're putting Def Leppard to shame! Was part of the reason losing Henrik Bath, your previous singer?

Henrik leaving the band actually had nothing to do with it. It´s a long time but we've been busy doing other things. The main reason is that we are involved in another band called Darkwater, which Henrik and Magnus decided to focus on. We have released two albums with Darkwater during these twelve years and I have also released two albums under the name of 7 Days. We also have full time jobs, and some of us also have families and other things that happen or keep you busy. So it's just not that easy to release albums but it won't be five years until the next one.

On the album your new lead singer is Daniel Heiman of Heed and Lost Horizon, who I think does a magnificent job. How did he end up joining the band?

We came to know Daniel through a friend who knows him really well, so we were just lucky. We had some auditions for the new album but we felt that none were as good as Henrik and we'd always thought about Daniel since he did his guest performance on the track 'Inner Peace' on our second album 'Chapter II: Aftermath'. So it was natural to choose him and we are really happy that he's singing on the album, he really brings a new dimension to our sound. Although Daniel is only a guest singer but we hope to work with him in the future as well. He gets a lot of proposals to sing on albums and he usually doesn't do many guest vocals.

The musicianship on the album is amazing. You must have worked really hard to get everything you wanted from it on to the new CD?

Thanks again, yes we have really worked very hard and paid a little extra attention to details this time around. We recorded most of the album in our own studios, which is relaxing and gives you the chance to "perfect" everything and take your time and not leave much up to chance

The music on the new album is, for me anyway, a lot more mature in sound and style than the earlier albums. By this I mean the youthful sound of ten years ago has been replaced by older heads.

I fully agree. We have evolved in everything from our playing skills to the way we approach song writing and we are also much better at handling the whole process of making an album, you know, producing, recording etc.

The songs also seem less frantic and more laid back in the way they have been written than before. Was this an intentional way of writing the new album, letting the songs breath and grow rather than ramming them down the fans' throats?

I think that comes naturally as your writing and playing skills evolve, it's nothing we actually think much about. But I'm glad that is the impression you get when you hear the music. We had a lot of songs to choose from though – I write a lot of music. That helps.

One thing I love about the album is the production which is stunning. Who produced it?

We produced it ourselves actually, but much of the praise should be given to Studio Fredman for the great mix that they did on the album. They did a really great job for us. The mix is everything

Is Harmony now a full time band for you all because I know that the members of the band have a lot of other acts that they are involved with. And with being such a busy group of musicians will you be able to go out and tour with the new album?

We're a full time band except that Daniel is only a guest vocalist, so we have to wait and see what will happen in the future. On the touring front we can't make any promises, we just have to wait and see what happens next. We don't know if Daniel will sing with us live, he is always busy with other things.

What does the future hold for Harmony? Hopefully it won't be another four or five years before we get a new album from you!

As boring as it sounds, again we have to wait and see, and wait for the response that we get for the new album. We hope to play live but like I said can't make any promises. We will also start working on a new album; and it will not take us six years to complete this time!

A Heavy Metal legend in his homeland, the Polish "voice of the genre" Grzegorz Kupczyk returns with his band CETI and what is the sixteenth effort in their catalogue, 'Brutus Syndrome'. On the eve of the new album's release, Grzegorz chatted with Alexandra Mrozowska about the details of the upcoming release, CETI's 2013 incursion over to the UK and more.

What can the listener expect from the new CETI album 'Brutus Syndrome'? What are the differences between this one and its predecessor in terms of music?

One difference between the two is that we tune the guitars differently, the pitch and tone being higher this time. Also, this album marks the band's return to fine melodies sound-wise; the overall impression is that the material is somewhat more catchy this time, but still with a Metal edge.

Although CETI has been known for their monumental Metal ballads in the past, there were no ballads as such on your previous album. How it's going to be this time, with 'Brutus Syndrome'?

This time, there is one. It's pretty moving, entitled 'Something More'. There is a story related to how was it made, as there were actually two versions of it. The first one was recorded in my home studio, all guitars and vocals being recorded by myself with a much different rhythm and chord progression. However, while rehearsing it we've made up our minds about changing things a little bit and our guitarist Barti ended up re-arranging the whole track. That was how the album version of this song was made. Its original version wasn't laid to waste though, as it resurfaced on the album as an intro to 'Second Sin'. With this one, we came up with the idea of using baritone guitar strings on the acoustic guitar, so the whole track had to be played an octave lower. This turned out to be a great idea in the end.

Was the sound of the new album influenced by the recent personal changes within the band's line-up?

Definitely. Those line-up changes resulted in a new bassist – Tomasz Targosz – joining forces with us. His bass sounds way different than that of his predecessor; it's a solid, feisty style of playing that is all of his own, influenced heavily by his great technical prowess. As for the overall sound, CETI continues on playing in their own style and yet, this album marks a progress with more of a modern edge and contemporary touches to our music.

What's the meaning of the title 'Brutus Syndrome'? Is it a suggestion of the concept the lyrics on the album are going to revolve around?

Actually, I came up with the title after I watched the 1979 film 'The China Syndrome', but, as often happens, I was trying to reflect on things in a broader context. Consequently, I could say the lyrics on the album revolve around the concept of a 'sin of betrayal', but there's no pomposity to them. The lyrics are about people, their fate and the problems that the human kind's co-existence causes.

Talking about lyrics – they're in English again. Are the reasons why artists from non-English speaking countries record in English purely commercial? What do you think is the difference between songwriting in English and in Polish?

Well... once upon a time, it was French that one had to know to communicate with the other educated Europeans and now it's English. Besides, there are other parallels – it sounds best to sing in Italian if you're a Classical musician and, consequently, if you're a Rock musician the best solution is to sing in English. Is it a commercial move? I have to admit it is, unfortunately in our reality I find it hard to imagine crowds of people invading every record store in Poland to buy Rock albums made by the bands of their homeland (laughs). And, with the record sales in Poland being at an all-time low, it's better to sing in English and appeal to the audiences worldwide. As far as the specificity of songwriting, it could have been more convenient for me to write in my native language instead of translating things from one language to another... on the other hand, English sounds more of a musical language so there is no compromise between the melody and the message and you can keep things shorter and more concise.

The music video that you've recently made to 'Wizards Of The Modern World' shows mainly the footage of the band working in the studio. Whose idea was it?

It was mine. Throughout the years we've made so many videos that I thought it's better to go for simple and genuine things this time – no make-up and posing allowed! However, you may be a bit shocked by our next video that's going to illustrate 'Game Of Love'! (laughs)

Good, you've mentioned 'Game Of Love'. This largely anticipated track wasn't included in the album's official track-list. What's happened to it?

It's going to be released only as a single in three different versions – different languages and different takes on it. I can reveal that in one of these versions you'll hear Alessandro del Vecchio sharing lead vocals with me! I got to know him during the tribute concert to Ronnie James Dio, 'King Of Rock n' Roll', organized by Scream Maker's Sebastian Stodolak and held in Warsaw a few months ago. We became friends instantly and out of this friendship, we decided we should work together... I hope that it's just the beginning!

In October 2013 you toured the UK, playing in London, Glasgow, Edinburgh, Aberdeen... What was the experience of playing for the British audience?

The experience was simply amazing, the British people are one of the finest audiences! We've had both British natives and Polish immigrants at the gigs and the audience's reaction was wonderful. I'll always look back on it fondly. We'll return as soon as we get a chance. I hope next year will bring the announcement of some UK tour dates and there's talk about our return to London, so let's keep our fingers crossed!

In 2006 you collaborated with the Hard Rock act of your homeland, Kruk. You've released an album 'Memories' covering Rock classics. Can we expect this collaboration to be continued?

It's in the pipeline; me and Piotr Brzychcy are talking about it with a big record label right now. Chances are we may enter the studio in mid 2015.

Are you satisfied with the path you tread as a musician after more than thirty years on stage fronting CETI as well as Turbo, Non Iron and so on?

I'd never exchange it for anything in the world. Music is the air that I breathe, the life that I live, the God's gift given to me. I'm fulfilled in my artistic life and a happy person and I'd like to thank all of my fans – hope to see all of you at one of CETI's concerts!

CRAZY LIXX

Sweden's Craxy Lixx are back with their fourth album, the fantastic, self-titled 'Crazy Lixx'. Ian Johnson talks with the band's vocalist Danny Rexon about song writing, KISS, learning how to produce an album and more.

I findthe new album to be one of those releases where you keep on waiting for the average song to come along and spoil everything…this doesn't happen on the new CD…

Thanks Ian, that means a lot. Actually we've worked for a long time on this one to get it just right. Before, what we'd do was book a studio for a couple of weeks, go in and work as hard as possible to make an album. This time around we recorded it bit by bit when we felt inspired to work. It was the same thing with how we wrote the songs, we'd work on two or three here and there, then another two or three a while later, until they were just right for us. Then we'd do the same thing over again until it was finished. This new way of writing and recording really worked for us. So instead of it taking just a few weeks to write and record an album, this one took us well over a year to make and that's why I think it sounds the way it does.

Who writes the songs, is it a whole band effort or just a couple of you?

Usually it's me or our guitarist Andy Dawson who does the writing. We write and record full demos at our home studios and then bring them to the rest of the band. Usually the song is almost finished but in my case the lyrics aren't the final ones, just silly guide words so the band can get a feel for the song. Then as a band we decide if it's good enough for us and then we all put in our own flavours. Then we'll probably change the lyrics and maybe some of the arrangements will get altered and that's how we work as a band.

Why is the new album self-titled? Was it a way to say to your fans that this is the kind of music that brought us here in the first place, a back to the start kind of thing?

Actually calling it 'Crazy Lixx' came very late in the process of making the album. We had lots of album titles but none of them seemed right, then we looked at calling the album after one of the song titles on the CD but again that didn't feel quite right. In the end we thought why not just call it Crazy Lixx? We felt that this album was a sum of what we'd done before and what we were doing now and this album felt like the first real Crazy Lixx album that we'd made. This whole album has songs on it that we, and especially me, want the fans to associate with Crazy Lixx. If older fans like them then that's great but if a new fan comes along and listens to the album and thinks because of the title that this is our first album, then that's great as well. It's a new starting point for us, I think. Not that we're not proud of our last couple of albums, because we are, but this new CD feels like a new beginning for us and we all love the way this one has turned out.

The new album has a lot of 80s influences on it but I feel a love for KISS emanating from the songs.

I'm a big KISS fan and especially Paul Stanley, both his work with KISS and the songs he's written for other people. I really love the stuff he has written with Desmond Child. So saying that we have a KISS vibe going on is a big compliment.

You've made a video for 'Hell Raising Woman'. What can you tell us about it and why aren't there any hell raising women in the video?

Ha ha ha! Well basically no ladies because of the cost, dreaded economics at play I'm afraid! The true reason is that the album took a long time to make and we had a deadline to get it to Frontiers, our record company, so when it came time to do the video we didn't have a lot of time left to record it. Then we'd also spent a lot on the album so our budget for the video wasn't a lot, so that's why it's just the band rocking out. We had a lot of fun while making it and maybe next time we'll have some lovely ladies in the video!

'Riot Avenue' had a much less polished and rawer production than the new album. What's changed?

Our first two albums were produced by the wonderful Chris Laney. Unfortunately he wasn't available for 'Riot Avenue' so we took a leap of faith and decided to produce it ourselves. The idea was then to leave the mixing to Chris. We soon found however that we weren't very good at the recording process. Still, I feel what happened was a learning process for us and it taught us what you can and can't do in a studio. Because of our lack of experience there wasn't a lot of vocal, guitar, etc. overlays, so there was less of everything, which you can tell by the punky, raw sound on that album. When Chris tried then to mix it for us, he just didn't get on with the album so we decided to mix it ourselves with the help of a friend who's a studio engineer. This was the best possible thing for us because it taught all of us a lot about production techniques and we loved that. When it came to the new album we said this time we'll produce it again ourselves but use everything we've learnt. So this time there's loads of everything; layers of musicality, guitars, bass drums everywhere and then Chris came in, loved what we'd produced and the mix that he has done for the album is great. Most importantly, doing the last two albums this way was great thing for us because it taught us so much.

Where can we see you on tour then Danny, and what's next for Crazy Lixx?

Well at the moment in the UK we are playing just the one gig - mainly because we're taking a bit of a break over the next few months - in Wales at HRH next year, which will probably be our first gig in support of the new album. My second child is due soon in December so I'll take a vacation with my family over Christmas to celebrate the birth and help out. Then in February we'll probably do a warm up show but really we'll just be sitting things out, waiting for everything to come together next year. We're going to be a little bit more picky I think, as to what we do live next year, so no big tour just yet.

Hopefully the fans will like what we do and buy the album, which is what all bands need. We all have day jobs and if you buy the album it helps us to continue making music and it helps support the best music in the world and not the mainstream crap that is shoved down your throats all the time!

Hear hear, say I.

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RUSSELL ALLEN

Vocalist Russell Allen has a lot on the go at the moment – the singer took some time out from his very hectic schedule with Trans Siberian Orchestra in order to speak to Carl Buxton about the new Allen/Lande album, Trans Siberian Orchestra commitments and the Level 10 project that's just seen the light of day.

With all of those afore mentioned projects happening around the same time, it would seem Russell has one heck of a busy workload.

"Well, that's not necessarily true" he says matter-of-factly. "What happens is, like, I didn't know that Frontiers was going to release the Level 10 thing. I recorded that three years ago – Ha! Yeah, so they've been holding onto it for a long time I guess, just waiting for the right time. I didn't think they would put it out so soon after Allen/Lande '4' you know? Coz a lot of people are excited about that release. And I don't understand the strategy or what their thinking is. Maybe Frontiers just wanna get it out? I have no clue. But yeah, the perception is people don't understand how these things work sometimes. They think 'Oh, you must have recorded all this stuff you must be working pretty fast over the course of three or four years', you know what I mean? I did just finish recording the new Symphony X record and I did it in, you know, like eight days. Eight days work," he says laughing. "I had to get it done before I came out with T.S.O. I've toured twice this year. I toured with Adrenaline Mob in March and now with T.S.O. I did one show with Symphony X which was great, up in Montreal. I like to keep working coz it keeps my voice in great shape, you know Symphony X just doesn't work that much, but next year we'll start to kick things up again."

I asked Russell if he has any difficulties interpreting other people's lyrics, such as Timo Tolkii's on the new Allen/Lande record for example, than he would his own?

"It doesn't matter to me either way if I wrote it or not. As long as I understand the story and I understand the motivation or whatever, then I can sing the song. It's not something whereby I had to write it in order to have an emotional attachment to it. I mean, of course, a few words are going to be expressed that are a little easier to find that *'thing'*, and to be there because it comes from you, but, you know, a great song is a great song and if I can connect with that song. Like even singing Trans Siberian Orchestra stuff, I didn't write any of the music but I can connect with the story, I can connect with songs like 'Find My Way Home', you know all that sort of stuff, especially being out here and away from home during Christmas. It's pretty easy to find that emotional level, where it's like 'wow', I miss this, or that and that song is what that's about, and then I'm able to sing from the heart. That's really what I try to do with everything, it's just me, singing from the heart, be soulful and mean every word."

Russell wasn't with Timo Tolkki when the album was being written but it was something that was presented to him and Jorn at a later date. Remembering I'd seen Russell playing live with Symphony X in London when they supported Stratovarius a decade or so ago, I knew they'd met previous to this new Allen/Lande album being put together.

"I've known Timo for a long time. We toured together when Stratovarius and Symphony X went on a really cool European tour in 2003, so that's where I got to know him. I think he's a great song writer, he came to me with it - there's more I had to do on this record than the last one in terms of a little bit of writing here and there, but nothing major; tweaking some of his ideas, picking songs, but he pretty much did everything and presented me with the music as he did with Jorn. Magnus (Karlsson) would give me a complete thing - lyrics, harmonies, everything – just reproduce it and you can feel good. This is more like 'Hey I've got some artistic freedom here.' If you want to add harmonies…I've always produced all the vocals at my place for these things – tracked my own harmonies, write out all that stuff, whatever. People trust me – I rarely get any complaints (laughs). When the time came that Timo was going to step in and do this, I thought 'Well this is great. I think this is what this needs, a breath of fresh air. If we're going to continue and try to make more of these albums – people really like them so that makes me happy and I'm probably happy that Timo's brought a new energy to this project and given it a new life."

Bearing in mind it had been four years since 'The Showdown' album had come out I wanted to get an angle on why now and why the new direction with Timo Tolkki. Russell was a little bit in the dark to be fair.

"Honestly Carl, I really don't know. I was approached by Serafino, 'Hey, would you like to do another one - are you guys in? And we've got Timo Tolkki on board.' Well, yeah, this'll be fun, I'm down, it sounds like fun. So that's kind of how that went. So I was totally cool with it. Serafino, he's a smart guy, he's a big fan, first and foremost and he does it for the love of the artiste and the music that we create – his heart's in the right place, so I think that has a lot to do with it, and why it's successful. I was happy to work with Jorn again on this thing and Timo stepping in, but the whole thing with Magnus not being involved I have no idea of the details with that. I didn't really question it to be honest. I just figured well, okay, he's not interested so let's see what Timo can come up with, that was kind of my attitude, do you know what I mean?"

With Magnus writing in a certain way, more neo-classical to Timo's more Symphonic elements, the album was always going to be slightly different in its musical approach, although the core vocal arrangements were likely to be untouched, but the continuity factor would be somewhat altered from a fan's perspective. When put to Russell he was quite forthcoming.

"A little bit, but I'm so confident in the guy's writing ability and I think that you can hear it, obviously with songs like 'BitterSweet', all these other tracks that people are really, really into on this album. I didn't have any doubt in my mind that he could deliver a great record, because I *know* him. A little more in my neck of the woods, the Symphonic Rock/Symphonic Metal – whatever you wanna call it – I was just very comfortable with his stuff coz I'm kind of used to it, with the Baroque stuff with (Michael) Romeo and all that stuff. I knew it was going to be super melodic and I felt it would have that style of guitar here and there but I think he really honed it in and made it work for Allen/Lande because too much of that stuff just doesn't fit in this project and I think he put just enough of it to have that signature sound of his, but it's really about the singing. The songs are really focussed on the singers – they're singers songs, these songs. They're not gonna blow you away with a tonne of noodling and stuff – it's not what it is, I think Timo was really smart and wise in his grafting of these songs and making these arrangements appropriate for Allen/Lande."

Lacuna Coil

Italian Goth Metallers Lacuna Coil frequently play the UK, whether they have new product to promote or not. Dave Bott was unable to interview them when 'Broken Crown Halo' was released earlier in 2014, so he took the opportunity to catch up with the engaging Cristina Scabbia before the band's recent Manchester show.

There have been a few changes in the band's line-up since you were last here, the first for sixteen years or so. Has this changed the sound or dynamic in any way?

Well the sound hasn't really changed at all. The three main song-writers are still part of the band, Andrea Ferro, Marco Biazzi and myself, so the attitude and style of the songs remains the same. We're still friends with Criz Mozzati and Christiano Migliore; they just wanted to retire. The show must always go on and actually our bass player Marco Zelati isn't here for this leg of the current tour and didn't make it over to America either. He recently had surgery to resolve an intestinal problem but he's doing fine and should be back with us soon. Our guitar tech Daniel is filling in and because he knew all the songs already; he was an obvious choice.

It must feel strange having a different line-up after all these years?

It was a little weird at first but it is important that everyone in the band is motivated by what we do. It is not an easy life at times, due to all the travelling; if someone isn't happy then it affects everyone else. Right now it's nice to be on tour with people who really want to be here and it has given us extra energy. It's almost like LC have a new beginning.

The album was finished when Mozzati and Migliore were still with you so did you know before recording started that they both had plans to leave?

They had both been slightly unhappy for a while, mainly because of all the travelling. They wanted to focus more on their families and the band was no longer their main priority. They told us back in December but we only made it public in February. Like I said before we are all still friends and so it is not like there are any issues to resolve. Migliore lives in America now and came to see us play when we were there and I believe Mozzati will be coming to see us when we play in Milan.

Ryan Blake Folden played with you the last time you were in the U.K. because Mozzati had just become a father and couldn't make it. Was he the natural choice to fill the drum-stool or did you go through and audition process?

Folden was Mozzati's drum tech so it was just a natural choice really. The situation was the same as it is with Daniel now. Folden knew all the songs and because we had spent time on the bus together we already knew a lot about him. It was a lot less weird than have a complete stranger come into the band.

'Broken Crown Halo' was produced by Jay Baumgardner. You worked with Don Gilmore on 'Shallow Life' and 'Dark Adrenaline' so what prompted the change?

It wasn't because we didn't like the way Gilmore worked, we just wanted to try something different and when we were looking at using someone new it was obvious Baumgardner had a good reputation. The engineer on '…Halo', Kyle Hoffmann, was really good at taking care of all the little things during the recording process whereas Baumgardner is more of a "big picture" kind of guy. Baumgardner isn't there in your face all the time and left us to it when it came to the actual music.

The quality of the song-writing never seems to dip from album to album. Does it get any easier coming up with new ideas when you are writing songs or does it become more of a challenge as time goes by?

I wouldn't really call writing a challenge for us; it is almost like self-therapy. Writing is fun and it is a good way to tell everyone about our experiences in life. There is no real recipe for success and we just hope people like what we come up with each time. It's great that everyone loves the new record. Sometimes fans become attached to an older album and it is often difficult for them to accept something new but that isn't the case this time.

The album contains eleven songs but how many were actually written and came to any kind of fruition before the final track listing was decided upon?

We usually have ideas for a lot of songs but if we feel they are not right then we don't even work on them. We select the songs we think will make a good record and then focus on them. LC has a specific sound and so some ideas we not even considered because they would not fit in comfortably with other songs that we knew would definitely make the record. We are all very open-minded when it comes to the music each of us likes personally, but LC has a sound of its own.

Do you have any personal favourites on the album?

Even though I like them all, I have to admit that I am more attached to some than others because they are included in the live set, such as 'Nothing Stands In Our Way' and 'Zombies'. I also love 'Hostage To The Light' and 'Cybersleep' because it almost sounds like it could have been taken from a James Bond movie and I love soundtracks.

Is there any significance in the album title?

It is a representation that each of us lives in our own personal kingdom that includes your family, your work and your interests. Each one of us is in control, like a kind of King or Queen, but sometimes that kingdom can become "damaged" or "broken" by outside influences of which you have no control.

There is a passage during 'Die & Rise' that is sung in Italian. It is the first time for a number of albums that you have performed in any way in your first language?

The vibe was good, both weird and dark. We just thought that by singing it in Italian in would enhance the overall feel of the song.

Finally, what does the immediate future hold for LC?

We will be finishing the current European tour in our home town of Milan in a couple of weeks and though we may add some more dates in Italy, we will be taking a break for Christmas. We then have the Shiprocked cruise in 2015 and that is something I am really excited about. We did the 70,000 Tonnes Of Metal cruise this year and it was so much fun. We played two shows during the five day cruise and I wasn't sure what to expect because we were amongst all the fans who were there for a vacation as well as watching the bands. It was actually so relaxing and I just can't wait to do it again.

MAVERICK

Belfast hotshots Maverick have created a great debut album, 'Quid Pro Quo' that has elements of 80s Rock giants Skid Row, Van Halen and Winger. It's proof that young bands still love melodic rock music which is good news for the likes of you and me. Duncan Jamieson gets the lowdown on the Northern Irish hopefuls.

Having only formed 2012, you'll be an unknown quantity to many of the readers. Can you tell me about the guys in the band and how you got together?

The band initially started as a rock cover band (initially featuring former guitar player Chris Van Engelen) purely for fun until original ideas started being thrown about. As the quality of the original material increased, we grew in confidence and started thinking we might be on to something. Each of the members always had a strong passion for music and that passion combined to create a great chemistry in the band and we think our material reflects that. The band underwent a series of line-up changes before the final line-up heard on 'Quid Pro Quo'. The first version of what would become Maverick had Dave (vox) on drums! The Balfour brothers, Ryan (guitar) and Dave, had long been friends with Richie (bass) and Mike (drums), and we all began our musical relationship in music college. We later recruited Ric (guitar) after seeing him play live in another band, we were instantly impressed by his backing vocals and guitar work. He's always gonna be the new guy!

There's an obvious love for 80s melodic rock on the album. Despite being from Belfast there's a strong American sound in your music. Which bands have been an influence on you?

Yeah absolutely, we always found that American rock was focused on strong vocal hooks which is something we try to accomplish in our music. As I'm sure you can tell, we're all big fans of Winger, Def Leppard, Van Halen Guns n Roses, Mr Big, Extreme and many others. We believe that we write an interesting style of rock, unique to Northern Ireland, which combines our favourite elements of these bands, presenting them in a way which isn't heard often in our opinion. We try not to pigeon hole our music because we have always had a desire to be a band like Aerosmith that can write in a vast array of song styles whilst being accepted by their fan base.

The production is good and it captures the band's energy well. Tell me about the recording process?

The recording was done in Manor Park Studio, Northern Ireland by Neal Calderwood, the wizard himself! The whole album was recorded in two weeks straight where we stayed at the studio to get the full experience and to remain focused on being as good (drunk) as possible at all times. Many of the vocal harmonies that you hear on 'Quid' were unplanned and happened on the spot with a lot of help from Neal. Additionally, a lot of the guitar solos were scrapped last minute and completely reworked as cabin fever began to kick in! It was a great experience for us and we couldn't have asked for a better producer to work with.

There's a loose theme to the album coming from the title 'Quid Pro Quo'. How did that come about?

There's a recurring theme throughout the album which deals with the concept of "every action has an equal reaction". That being said, the title itself did initially come from Dave watching Lion King but still... We thought it was a great name with a great meaning and perfect for the songs we had and the album we had in mind. We didn't want to create a cliché hard rock album. Sure, there are party tunes in there such as 'Rock n Roll Lady', 'In Our Blood' and 'Electric' but many of the other songs deal with more serious themes and unfortunate consequences of specific situations. We feel this adds a degree of lyrical depth to the album which would make it a lot more interesting to the listener.

Who is the 'Snakeskin Sinner'?

Snakeskin Sinner is a song which was lyrically inspired by the classic WASP track 'Chainsaw Charlie'. We can happily say that it is not written from first hand experience and that we have never had the displeasure of meeting him.... yet! It is a story that is often heard in rock music folklore regarding unjust treatment of aspiring bands. We envisaged a comical stereotypical CEO of a record company whose greed was outlined by his gold teeth and indulgent footwear; his snakeskin boots!

What were the ideas that led to 'Quid Pro Quo (One More Day)', 'Last Addiction' and 'Side By Side'?

'Quid Pro Quo' is a track which was inspired by the suffering of innocent people in the midst of religious or political violent struggles. Often those who preach ideologies will hide behind masks or their beliefs to justify their actions. This song is partially written in a first person narrative dealing with this.

'Last Addiction' is about the many ways in which addiction can destroy a loving

relationship, whether that be through the tragic loss of a significant other or by two people being torn apart. The song portrays the thoughts of someone watching the person they care about destroy themselves and the relationship they're both involved in.

'Side By Side' was inspired by the Vietnam war but is not specifically about it. The lyrics can be applied to any conflict where any particular side has had to face up to the inevitability of their defeat. Whenever death is a certainty, the only decision a soldier has any control over is how he goes out and this song deals with a defiant group of soldiers who have decided to die fighting together.

The album's got some striking, rather dark artwork. What does it mean?

From a purely visual standpoint, it is a dark take on Lucas Cranach the Elder's works on 'Adam and Eve'. As Adam and Eve signify the creation of mankind, the cover of 'Quid Pro Quo' depicts the destruction of mankind. In the modern world, most of the power is held by bureaucrats and politicians who often lie to or bribe the public in order to further themselves or their agendas. As you can see on the cover, the bureaucratic figure on the left remains unscathed by the explosion, whilst paying off the common man on the right who is getting incinerated by the blast.

How was the video shoot for 'Paint By Numbers'?

Unbelievable – couldn't be paid to do it again! 12 hours 6PM to 6AM in a freezing open sided multi-story car park with no heating or lights (besides the props) hearing the same song on repeat isn't a party (laughs)! No, it was a great experience and we had no idea what we were in for. We had the pleasure of working with the guys from Red-Mist Productions who were very professional, came up with some great ideas and made a great video. We didn't know how much effort went into a music video but the views and acclaim we've received for it has made it all worthwhile.

How did you end up on the German Massacre label?

It came to the stage where we needed to think about creating press packs to send around the world following the release of our debut EP 'Talk's Cheap'. In doing this though, we decided we didn't want to just make a few EPKs so we wasted all the ink we could, grabbed a few tins of spray paint and designed a load of A4 parcels with gigantic 'Maverick' logos sprayed on them. Each logo looked totally different with whatever way we used the colours and some looked a LOT better than others. When they were all finished, Mike looked over at the parcel labelled for Massacre and said, "Boys, it looks like Massacre are signing us!" Pretty ironic stuff seeing as not long after these were sent, Massacre got in touch with us and here we are ready to release our debut album. The guys have been great to work with and we're grateful for the opportunity they've presented us.

What feedback have you had so far about the album?

Well, the album so far has received a number of very positive reviews from local and foreign journalists. Imagine our surprise getting a Nuclear Blast catalogue and seeing our faces in it! We had to get our German friend to translate it for us and luckily it turned out positive. In actual fact, Ryan has been in contact with Kane Roberts (former Alice Cooper guitarist) and after listening to it back to front, he had very positive and encouraging words which meant a lot coming from Kane. We're expecting many more reviews after the release.

Do you intend to tour this record?

Yes, absolutely! A lot of people have told us that we are definitely a live band above all else, and that they expect us to go far. Now it's up to us to try and live up to their expectations!(laughs) It all depends very heavily on funds and the availability of slots and bands to tour with but as it stands we're pushing to get in the festival circuit and promote the album as best we can using the internet and magazines. If we could, we'd be on the road the second the album is out! Do you happen to know if KISS are looking support? (laughs)

ten

ALBION

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SKILLET

After supporting Nickelback on last year's 'The Hits Tour', it seemed only a matter of time before Skillet headlined some of their own shows, as intimated by frontman John Cooper when Fireworks spoke to him during that last visit. A small UK tour precedes a European one and Atlantic Records has seen fit to release 'Vital Signs', a sort of 'Best of Skillet's Atlantic years' exclusively in Europe to coincide with the tour. Mike Newdeck took the opportunity to catch up with Cooper prior to the Wolverhampton show.

It's not lost on Skillet's John Cooper that this is the band's first ever UK tour, which consists of four dates.

"Well it's about time isn't it?" the singer jokes. "It's so exciting and we're here as headliners rather than supporting someone as we did on the Nickelback tour or when we do co-bills in America. It's our own show."

Cooper reasons as to why it's happening now.

"We need to get over here more often because people love Rock music," he enthuses. "Europe is next for another three weeks so we're going to hit it hard and we hope to keep coming back. It's time to give it a shot here."

It's difficult for a band like Skillet to weigh up the limits of their popularity, particularly in the UK, in order to gauge which venues to play at.

"Well I don't get involved with that side of things too much," Cooper confesses. "It gets left to PR and management to decide where we play. Promoters are heavily involved though and as part of their job they come up with a plan to see how many tickets would sell and pick venues accordingly. Although we did sell out the London gig we decided not to upscale and play a larger venue as it would have been too big; having said that, in Tilburg (Holland) we did end up booking a bigger venue. To be honest it was a shock when we came over here with Nickelback and found that people did actually know us."

As a way of promoting the band, Atlantic has decided to release 'Vital Signs ', a greatest hits album of sorts, exclusively in Europe.

"The reason that the album got conceived was because of this tour. It won't be released in America and we thought it would be something special for the fans in Europe and also those new to Skillet to back up that tour. It's a promotional tool really. Of course some people don't realise that we've been around for a while and so haven't heard some of our earlier material, this album gives them a chance to do that. It wasn't my idea but I liked it. It's like our greatest hits but without the title and sometimes with other songs that weren't our biggest hits but have played a huge part in our recording career and perhaps defined who we are. 'Rebirthing' is one of those songs, it's my favourite Skillet song and yet it wasn't a radio hit in America."

'Rebirthing' was the first song taken from the album 'Comatose', an album that essentially saw a transition from a Christian Rock band into a mainstream Rock band; a band whose star was on the rise.

"That album and the song mark a special place in time for us," the singer confesses. "Although we would have liked to have put songs on 'Vital Signs' from some of the albums before 'Comatose', from 'Collide' for instance. That didn't happen for legal reasons. Ardent, our previous independent label owned some of the albums and although Atlantic released 'Collide' it was already made by Ardent and 'Comatose' was the point when Atlantic started making and owning the albums. I would love to have put some of the 'Collide' songs on this new album."

Luckily the band are able to play songs from their Ardent back catalogue live as part of a headline tour, but it's more difficult fitting everything in as a support band.

"If you go see a band that has been around for eighteen years," Cooper theorises, "It usually means that that band has had hits for eighteen years. If you're U2 you'll play all the hits from years ago, but for Skillet most people have never even heard the first five records. Styles change and your sound updates and so you want people to hear what's relevant now. Hardcore Skillet fans want to hear the old songs as well. That said, we did have input into which songs from the three albums went onto 'Vital Signs'. I think I know what the fans like just by their response every night when we play them and it was actually pretty easy to select those songs. That, together with Twitter - people are always telling you what they like on there – meant that I had a good idea what should go on the album."

Skillet isn't shy of using social media and has recently done a series of web chats. Cooper takes up the story.

"We've always embraced social media. I think that it's because of that we've been around for so long. If you go back to 1996, that's when we had our first website and I'd never even heard of the internet. It was the guitar player who started the website thing and I believe we were one of the first bands to do it; it was like science fiction to me. To us our promotion was always touring and word of mouth and we learnt the latter really early on. That's really helped us with record sales; I mean 'Comatose' is about fifty thousand units from going platinum and yet there wasn't a single radio hit from that album, all the sales were generated from Myspace via friends of friends of friends. I do stuff because I love it, with impromptu signings - meet and greets and web-chats are the latest thing."

As Cooper is usually the one band member who enjoys interviews, it's somewhat surprising that the other members, including drummer Jen Ledger, have been taking part in these web-chats.

"We've done one for everyone and also another exclusively for the fan-club," he explains. "We thought it would be great for everyone to get to know the lesser known members of the band and once they did it they enjoyed it whilst overcoming their nervousness. We just love connecting with fans."

The Europe only release of 'Vital Signs' doesn't have any bonus tracks, a must for die-hard fans in Europe that already have the Skillet albums on import surely?

"This release happened so fast that it wasn't even considered," Cooper confesses. "We assumed that this was going to be aimed at people who'd never heard of Skillet at all and so it was a bit of a dip your toe and see effort."

Is the time now right for Skillet to make a mark in Europe?

"I'm really bad at predicting that," he continues, "but I really hope so. We're making the right inroads and noises and putting a lot of time and effort into it. People are accepting us and we generated much interest from the Nickelback tour. It looks like it's going well for us."

Cooper agrees that there is a current climate in the States at the moment that has made Europe more attractive to American Rock bands.

"Rock music is doing badly on our side of the Atlantic. I'm good friends with the guys in Alter Bridge and a few years ago I was talking to Mark Tremonti and he said that if you want to be a successful Rock band these days then you have to go to Europe. I was surprised because I didn't know that Europe liked Rock music, let alone us. The bands that do well in America are those that have influences besides Metal, with Skillet we are heavy but we have a melodic symphonic sound that perhaps feels a little younger than other Hard Rock bands. Hard Rock, apart from a few bands, isn't doing well in the States at all. It's either nostalgia or iconic bands that are doing well and sometimes even the nostalgia acts fail when they put on tours. It's very trend driven back home, it's all about what's cool today and as a band you can be in and out very quickly. It's all radio based and yet Skillet is lucky, or perhaps goes against the norm, because we've never really been on trend and we rely on our fan base which remains steady. Our fans don't come along because of a new radio hit. I will say this though, Rock music will come back, it never dies and no one can predict that it will. I mean leg warmers came back didn't they? The bands that do well in America are probably the really Hard Rock bands that haven't even been played on the radio. Hard Rock or Electronic Pop, that's what's happening right now, unless you're the next Iron Maiden or Korn with a fan-base that will religiously buy everything, it's tough."

The subject of faith has been well covered during previous interviews and although Cooper is a devout Christian, the band has evolved into a mainstream band that has Christian members. They still won a Dove award for outstanding contribution to Christian music and so their past cannot completely be forgotten.

"I always wanted to be in a band and play to Christian people, atheists and anyone in between," the front-man explains. "I didn't really care, but I do really like the Christian industry. I love it and I still do interviews for Christian radio, magazines as well as touring on Christian tours with other Christian bands. I grew up listening to Christian music and some parents won't let their kids go and watch other bands play and so I give them an alternative because it's cool and the parents are happy because we're a Christian band. I like to give something back. We're not a Christian Rock band, we're all Christians but we're in a Rock band, that's the difference. We're not preachy but our music has a lot of heart and positivity."

'Rise' has only been out for about a year but already Skillet is preparing their next release.

"Well we're writing at the moment and I've already turned in ten songs," Cooper enthuses. "We'll be writing some more during our next break and then we're back to touring in America in January next year for a couple of months and then we'll be in the studio recording the new album which we hope will come out early summer."

'Rise' and the European exclusive 'Vital Signs' are both out now on Atlantic Records.

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HIGHLIGHT

IMPERA - EMPIRE OF SIN
ESM271 - Out 23rd January 2015

Featuring:
Matti Alfonzetti - Tommy Denander - J.K Impera - Mats Vassfjord
Special guest John Leven, lead guitar on "Thunder In Your Heart"

Impera are a melodic rock "supergroup" who's individual members need no introduction. After "Legacy of Life" (ESM244) and the follow up "Pieces of Eden" (ESM259) we excitedly await January and the new album "Empire of Sin". This time Impera turn on some real feisty hard rock with songs like "The Beast is Dead" and "Don't Stop". John Leven (Europe) makes a guest appearance on "Thunder In Your Heart", a song he co-wrote and it's a song that really hits the spot. Impera have matured and honed their sound to perfection and this is their best outing yet.

CHINA SKY - CHINA SKY II
COMING SOON

A lot can change in 25 years. Countless fashion trends have come and gone, MTV stopped playing music videos, people began to explore a whole new universe called "the internet" and a forgotten album by a group called China Sky became a cult classic. With its soaring melodies, lush harmonies and flawless production, China Sky seemed destined to be a classic from the word go. Success seemed just around the corner, but six weeks later the band China Sky was no more. Now, 25 years later, China Sky has entered the studio to begin production of their second album. Ron Perry sums it up: "We feel the new material is better than anything on the first album, and we're incredibly excited about taking the band in the direction we had originally intended. We are in control of everything this time, and that makes all the difference". A lot can change in 25 years!

HOUSE OF X - HOUSE OF X
ESM269 - Out 24th Oct 2014

Danny Peyronel – Lead Vocals (ex UFO), Laurence Archer – Guitar, Backing Vocals (Grand Slam, Phil Lynott),
Clive Edwards – Drums (Wild Horses), Rocky Newton – Bass, Backing Vocals (Lionheart and ex MSG)

Escape music present you with the fantastic "House of X". The guys have between them previously worked with: WILD HORSES, DEF LEPPARD, MEAT LOAF, PHIL LYNOTT's GRAND SLAM, LIONHEART, TARZEN, NICK MASON, SWEET and of course, MSG and UFO, to name just a few!!! After showcasing their new material with hyper-encouraging results during the last few months, Clive, Rocky, Laurence & Danny went into the studio and the result is the excitng new release by House of X.

LAWLESS - R.I.S.E
ESM269 - Out 21st Nov 2014

Paul Hume (Demon) - Vocals, Rhythm Guitar
Howie G - (Ex Persian Risk) Guitars
Neil Ogden (Demon) - Drums
Josh (Tabbie) Williams (Ex Headrush) - Bass

British rock has always been a firm favourite with fans all around the world and Lawless purvey that classic British rock sound better than anyone. As with the first album "Rock Savage" this release is steeped in the 80's classic rock sound with a modern edge and includes soaring melodies, guitar hooks and face melting solos. As time has passed the band are united more than ever and have created a force to be reckoned with.

ALBUM REVIEWS

FIREWORKS GUIDE TO WHAT'S HOT AND WHAT'S NOT...

HAREM SCAREM
'THIRTEEN'
(Frontiers) **HARD ROCK**
Reviewed by Phil Ashcroft

Canadian Rockers Harem Scarem reappeared in 2013 after several years on a seemingly permanent hiatus, releasing a re-recorded version of their popular 'Mood Swings' record and touring with a show that included the whole album. Twelve months later they're back with their first all-new album since 2008's 'Hope', a record that divided opinion and probably went some way towards their decision to put the band to bed after twenty years and twelve studio albums. Currently with no permanent bass player, the recording is handled by original members Harry Hess (vocals, guitar, keys) and Pete Lesperance (lead guitar, bass, vocals), with long time member Creighton Doane handling the drums and original drummer Darren Smith helping out on those distinctive backing vocals.

HS are in the curious position of having covered many different styles in the past and made them all part of their sound without completely abandoning any of them as more records were made. Whilst many of their albums have their own distinct flavour, others have cherry picked from those different directions to make up an album that, however varied, still sounds like HS.

The cleverly titled 'Thirteen' is no different; taking its lead from the likes of 'Believe'/'Karma Cleansing', 'Weight Of The World' and the darker 'Overload' or 'Hope', although it has to be said that a vast majority of the songs have upbeat choruses with layers of the aforementioned harmony vocals, no matter how dark or contemporary the verse is.

Opener 'Garden Of Eden', for instance, has a technical, quirky guitar part, a big chorus and a Funky, almost Extreme-like instrumental breakdown, as does the great Rocker 'Saints And Sinners', both with shades of 'Karma Cleansing' (the song) in their construction and skillful delivery. They use the old dark verse/soaring melodic chorus method on the superbly catchy 'Troubled Times', 'Never Say Never' and the classic/modern hybrid 'All I Need', and reverse the trick on 'Early Warning Signs' with its brilliant Rocky verse and modern Power Pop chorus.

Elsewhere, 'Whatever It Takes' is a classic power ballad and 'The Midnight Hours' has a killer chorus, but the Poppy 'Live It' is just different, even for them, and takes quite a few plays to lodge itself in your brain with the others. Personally the darker strains of the closing track 'Stardust' is the absolute highlight, matching the depth of the best 'Voice Of Reason' tracks with the stirring conclusion of 'Change Comes Around'. Hess' vocals are as classy and emotional as usual and there are no fillers in Hess and Lesperance's songs, but what makes 'Thirteen' easily Harem Scarem's best album since 2002's 'Weight...' is Lesperance's guitar, which weaves its magic on every track with a series of clever riffs and well thought out solos, which when matched to the duo's excellent work on the other side of the studio window, makes this short-ish album fly by so fast that the only thing to do is play it again.

IMPERA
'EMPIRE OF SIN'
(Escape) **HARD ROCK**
Reviewed by Ian Johnson

Impera, the Hard Rock band formed around the amazing talents of Matti Alfonzetti (vocals – Jagged Edge, Scott Gorham, Skintrade), Tommy Denander (guitar – Toto, Paul Stanley, Alice Cooper), J.K. Impera (drums – Bruce Kulick, Graham Bonnet, Vinnie Vincent) and Mats Vassfjord (bass – Vinnie Vincent, John Corabi, Grand Design), are back with album number three. As good and as much as I enjoyed the first two albums, this one is in a whole different ball park.

Alfonzetti especially has upped his game and sounds more like he did in his early career, bringing to mind (at times) his exceptional work with the Bam Bam Boys. Impera, as a whole band, seem to have written and performed an album that has all the best things you could ever want to find on a Hard Rock release. Impera's drums are powerful and dynamic and Vassfjord's bass rumbles along driving the band as it does so. Alfonzetti, as previously mentioned, is outstanding, but again it's Denander who cements the whole thing together. His soulful fluid guitar work delivers solos and riffs that help the songs to reach their full potential and once again you wonder at just how good (and how needed) this guy is in the genre of Melodic Rock (he has played on about three billion albums by now hasn't he?).

Take a listen to the opening triumvirate of 'The Beast Is Dead', 'Evil (Become A Believer)' and 'Don't Stop' with their almost angry riffs, highly melodic vocals, hooks and high intensity bass and drums and tell me that these songs don't excite you. Then following this blazing start comes songs like the Eastern flavoured 'Hole In The Sky', which has Alfonzetti, roaring in a deep Bluesy drawl that makes you tremble in your very boots as he does so, and 'Darling', a Thin Lizzy-like ballad with a superb guitar solo that is complemented by some (again) outstanding emotion-filled vocals. Then there is my personal favourite, the beautiful 'End Of The World' where once again Alfonzetti, Impera, Vassfjord and Denander seamlessly combine with each other to create an amazing song and performance that few, in this or any other musical genre, can compete with.

2014 was a fabulous year for Rock music and Impera look like they're kicking off 2015 with a BANG! Do yourselves a favour and join this explosion by grabbing a copy of this superb album, you won't be sorry that you did.

NIGHTINGALE
'RETRIBUTION' '
(InsideOut) **MELODIC ROCK**
Reviewed by Gary Marshall

This album caught me by surprise, in a very good way. With the likes of Dan Swanö (Edge Of Sanity, Witherscape), his brother Dag (Pan, Thy, Monium), Tom Björn (Memento Mori) and Erik Oskarsson (Godsend) on board, I thought it would be heavy, growly and dare I say challenging?

As the saying rightly goes, "never judge a book by its cover", as I couldn't have been more wrong; these guys have produced a stunning Melodic Rock album and to my mind they wouldn't be out of place at Firefest as they touch AOR and Melodic Prog whilst visiting all genres in between. I was hooked after one listen, every song being a winner and this album's now a real contender for my end of year "Best Of" selections.

I was amazed to discover that this is their seventh studio album but a bit of research quickly revealed why I'd not heard of them before. Their earlier work conformed to my preconceptions; praise be the growling has gone to be replaced by beautifully gritty but melodic vocals of the very highest order.

'On Stolen Wings' opens the album in terrific style with a superb riff, a melody and a chorus that oozes class. Also the arrangement maintains interest throughout with good use of heavier and lighter motifs. Immediately it's clear this is album is a bit special.

'Lucifer's Lament' has a Tyketto style beginning (voice over plucked guitar) before the whole band kicks in with another excellent refrain. Again, as throughout the album, the chorus is instantly memorable. Some 1980's keyboard accentuations are perfectly placed while 'Chasing The Storm Away' is one of the best AOR songs I've heard this year.

'Warriors Of The Dawn' is heavier and brings to mind a Dream Theater/Jorn Lande hybrid, albeit with the vocals reined in a bit. 'Forevermore' is built on similar foundations; the Toto-esque piano on the bridge is a lovely touch. 'Divided I Fall' is an acoustic guitar and piano driven power ballad that is an absolute delight.

'The Voyage Of Endurance' gets things back on heavier footing while '27 (Curse Or Coincidence?)' is about those artists who all died at that age (Jimi Hendrix, Kurt Cobain….) and is another melodic monster; the heavy and light sections are used to brilliant effect.

'The Maze' is the closest to Prog Metal but even then the inherent melody is still evident while closer, 'Echoes Of A Dream', is one of those building songs that rounds things out wonderfully.

If a mixture of bands such as Kamelot, Rush, Gotthard, Kansas, Toto, Tyketto, Avantasia, Presto Ballet (amongst others) appeals, then this is without doubt an album that should be part of your collection.

23 ACEZ – 'REDEMPTION WAVES' *(Mighty/Target)* MODERN/ALTERNATIVE

I can't remember too many Belgian bands coming my way in the past so I had no real idea what to expect before playing 'Redemption Waves' for the first time. This Modern Rock quartet have been together since 2010, releasing a debut album just a year later. Founder member vocalist/guitarist Benny Willaert has now a stable line-up around him and, though I haven't heard the first release, I'm assuming that can only benefit 23 Acez in terms of the music. Alongside Tom Tas (lead guitar), Tom Mundez (bass) and Jonathan Breaeckman (drums), Willaert has created a Modern Rock record that takes in a number of styles, proving that musical boundaries can be crossed with ease and without losing any identity or integrity.

'Loopholes' gets things underway with some galloping drums and crunching riffs, featuring a hook that borders on AOR, before breaking down to an energetic Tas solo. 'Alone' is similar in attitude and style to the opener and the structure also incorporates a number of the 'Loopholes' ideas whilst adding keyboards to enhance the sound.

Just when you think you have 23A nailed, 'The Bigger Picture' comes along with its bouncing riffs and distinctly Scandinavian melodies. Keyboards are pushed to the fore and another imaginative Tas solo strengthens the more AOR-like comparisons. 'Colors On The Ceiling' beefs up the sound and has a dirtier vibe but once more pushes the keys forward to compliment the power of the guitar.

The title track is something of a mini-epic, coming across like a Heavy Metal version of a Modern Rock band, full of angst and aggression but still with melody to burn. 'Descending' has elements of Kings X during the verse and though it's by no means Progressive, there are a number of time shifts during its brief running time.

The production values on 'Redemption…' are a little thin at times and Willaert occasionally wavers on the vocal front. I'm guessing that budget limitations dictated the recording process, meaning fewer takes, but there is still a lot to admire. Lyrically the themes revolve around the search for solving problems on an emotional and personal level, without being too much of a Dr Phil, and though there are no ballads the overall balance of 'Redemption Waves' is not affected due to the quality of the material.

23 Acez are not an easy band to pigeon hole as they incorporate a number of styles well into each song. I imagine with the backing of a bigger label and a bigger budget they can only get even better.

Dave Bott

4TH DIMENSION – 'DISPELLING THE VEIL OF ILLUSIONS' *(PowerProg)* PROGRESSIVE

Knowing that 4th Dimension was founded by a vocalist and keyboardist – both steeped in powerful Melodic Rock – one's expectations reach the upper echelons of hearing majestic, epic musical journeys. This release is the group's second effort and those expectations are totally fulfilled!

Founding members Andrea Bicego (on vocals) and keyboardist Talete Fusaro are joined by guitarist Michele Segafredo, bassist Stefano Pinaroli and drummer Massimiliano Forte. These five Italians assertively display their passion for classically-influenced, complex and powerful Rock as they have done since 2009, honing their skills both individually as well as collectively. Each creation flows towards and in to the next – filling our ears with sonic brilliance!

The group's first album, 'The White Path To Rebirth', was released in 2010 and set the standard and 'Dispelling The Veil Of Illusions' – which the group worked on throughout 2012 and last year – has soared higher and beyond all expectations.

An elevated mark, this second effort finds 4th Dimension on a much higher musical plateau, living and breathing in the rich, deep musical rivers they find there. Ambitious flows are mastered with their use of Modern Rock signatures and blending these with traditional classic movements. The result is a vast production of Melodic yet aggressive sound. These seas of sonic waves are topped by the wide range of vocal styles that are set to fly by Bicego!

What we also find is an offering up of an adventuresome attitude but one tempered with traditional musical sensibilities; Orchestral but not heavy handed, complex flows but not over complicated, simply free flowing and heroic in sound are all phrases that apply.

Now, although commenting on their complex compositions and their ability to seamlessly flow one unto the other, we are not over burdened at all! Over all, the sound is almost air, light and effortless, actually floating out of your speakers and landing gently on your ears. '… Illusions' is a very uplifting collection of classically-tinged Melodic Rock.

Just think of 'Dispelling The Veil Of Illusions' as a full-bodied, powerful Melodic Rock creation wrapped in the finest textured silks. Each movement a living, finely layered, musical statement and a resonating soundscape!

Bruce E.J. Atkinson

AMULET – 'THE FIRST' *(Century Media)* HEAVY METAL

Formed in 2010, Amulet provide "no-thrills", old-school Heavy Metal, their style being reminiscent of so many NWOBHM legends – early Iron Maiden, Savage and Wytchfynde come to mind.

Starting off with some double-bass drum fury, 'Evil Cathedral' gives singer Jamie Elton chance to show off the thuggish charm in his vocals, although the song in itself is quite simple. 'Glint Of The Knife' has a distinctively dark twist and brings to mind Angelwitch and Satan, although the vocals are little wobbly at times, which robs the song of its potency.

By the time we get to 'Bloody Night' things get a little predictable and the unfortunate impression of a band heading for musical obscurity is given.

Things do pick up, however, for 'The Flight' – a keyboard instrumental piece which sounds like a classic eighties horror musical score. The chime of a distant bell and thunder introduces 'Talisman' which takes us on a darker path, where the influence of Witchfinder General and Quartz is very noticeable in the dense instrumental.

At last, the band find their feet with doom-laden 'The Sacrifice' and 'Mark Of Evil' before subsequently tapping into a hard-hitting riff from the Black Sabbath school of guitar on 'Wicked 'N' Cruel'.

Musically, Amulet pays homage to the corpses of so many forgotten bands, quite where they fit in today's Metal music scene remains to be seen.

Ray Paul

ANDROBB – 'STILL ON THE RUN' *(IMusician)* HARD ROCK

Poor Androbb must have done something bad because for their third album they're still running from something. Judging by the lyrics on the title track it had something to do with comments on Facebook. We have clearly arrived at Heavy Metal for the 21st century.

Anyway, said track is quite the punchy number; solid riff action and a pounding drum attack set up a rollicking number that would have been better placed higher up the track list because there's a good chance you won't get this far into proceedings.

Opening with the tedious 'Tell Me The Truth' means 'Still On The Run' takes the wrong turn immediately thanks to its plodding monotony. There are some fine guitars on display and the odd wailing solo that makes this listenable at all.

Most confusingly are the lyrics that appear to be delivered by a man shouting that makes them sound altogether creepy; "wanna ride my rocket tonight" and "ooh, touch me again, kiss me where I like it the most" will not get the groupies swarming. Dreary lyrics on 'Sorry' and '…Truth' get nowhere near the emotive plane they reach for and end up dipping their toes in the pastiche pool.

Musically, the lads from Liechtenstein can certainly get an amplifier working and some of the intros have a strong 1980s-era Whitesnake sound when John Sykes was squealing out some of the finest riffs in Hard Rock. But the heavy repetition makes it sound like Sykes playing in a pub band.

Subsequent listens do not unveil any hidden layers, only show the cracks in the same ones. Androbb will have to keep running until they find what they're looking for because they are a long way off it yet.

Dan Bond

ANDY MARTONGELLI – 'SPIRAL MOTION' *(Independent)* INSTRUMENTAL

People often seem surprised that Italy produces some of the best Power Metal bands and shredders, such puzzlement seems ludicrous given that this is the country that produced Paganini, probably one of the first shredders to gain "Rock Star" status, albeit in 1838 (if you don't know where I'm coming from YouTube Jason Becker playing Paganini's 5th Caprice). And so we come to Andrea Martongelli, better known as a guitarist with Arthemis, and 'Spiral Motion', his solo offering and an instrumental one at that.

Opening track 'Eternal' grooves along with riffs and themes to grasp your interest. Martongelli shreds but he shreds with purpose, the notes are there for a reason and not because he can run up the frets at warp speed.

Having said that, 'Screaming Ninja' is like Rainbow on Red Bull, so fast you think he may go arse over tit, but he doesn't… ever. 'Infected Garbage Blues' is heavy with an Industrial feel, whereas 'Venomous' is a song Yngwie Malmsteen would be proud of. If Rick Wakeman played guitar, he probably would have written 'Father'.

'Cyber Hammer Of The Gods' is an energetic, riffy romp with some very nice wah'ey arpeggios while 'Dark Days' slows it down and shows that Martongelli has some real feel. 'Phoenix Rising' is another track with an Industrial vibe, a touch of Wakeman and some intriguing Spanish style guitar and keyboards, yeah I know it sounds weird but it works, trust me.

Penultimate track 'Dead Symphony' also has a retro seventies thing going on and the guitar does a pretty fine impression of a Theremin. Finishing up with the riff laden, shredding, screaming 'Bite The Bullet', this album leaves you feeling decidedly satisfied.

The risk with solo instrumental albums is the danger they will be self indulgent noodling

BAILEY – 'LONG WAY DOWN' *(Frontiers)* HARD ROCK

Bailey, A.K.A Nigel Bailey, singer and bassist with Three Lions (along with ex-Dare and Ten members Vinny Burns and Greg Morgan), is a relatively new name on the Rock scene, yet has spent years performing in cover bands around his native Yorkshire whilst also penning his own material. After some of Bailey's demo tracks were aired on ARFM's Steve Price Rock Show and Paul Nichols' Live & Loud radio show, Bailey took the plunge in 2011 and sent the demos to Frontiers President Serafino Perugino and a deal was struck to record an album. However, as Bailey was still an unknown quantity, Frontiers decided to delay the release of said album and instead team up the singer with other artists with more of a pedigree to assist with promoting his name, and the excellent Three Lions self-titled debut album (reviewed by myself back in issue #63) became Bailey's first release. But for all intents and purposes, 'Long Way Down' is actually Nigel Bailey's debut album, and a damn fine one it is too!

Anyone who enjoyed the TL album will certainly appreciate '…Down' as Bailey's amazing voice and knack of composing a stonking melody are once again at the very core of this album; however, this time around much of the record takes a slightly heavier direction. The likes of 'Feed The Flames' and 'Long Way Down' are firmly entrenched in the Classic Hard Rock vein as opposed to the more traditional AOR of TL, while 'Bad Reputation' is constructed around a Funky groove, with a horn section surfacing sporadically. The two highlights for me in particular are the riff-driven, pulsating Rocker 'Dirty Angel' that closes the album on a high, while 'In The Name Of The King' is very much the epic it suggests itself to be, dominated by a sprawling heavy riff and rhythm section, with a structure and lyrics that should certainly get approval from Ten's Gary Hughes.

Elsewhere, the rousing 'Dirty Little Secret', the ultra-commercial 'Stay' and 'Love Falls Down' would easily nestle comfortably alongside the likes of 'Trouble In A Red Dress' and 'Holy Water' on '…Lions'. Also, on the lighter side is the mid-tempo 'Ticket To Yesterday', while the delightful 'Somewhere In Oslo' flirts with a West Coast sound; 'Spend The Night is the album's solitary ballad with a masterful vocal from Bailey.

Recorded under the guidance of Alessandro Del Vecchio ensures perfect audio quality, while guitarist Mario Percudani and drummer Alessandro Mori turn in sterling performances. Two excellent albums in the space of around six months is definitely an encouraging start to Nigel Bailey's recording career, certainly after so many years of performing at grass-roots level. This deserves your attention.

Ant Heeks

with no real direction, not so with 'Spiral Motion'. Andy Martongelli never loses sight of the fact that each track is a song that has purpose and he succeeds magnificently. Yes he plays a lot of notes very fast, but he knows where each one belongs and he never loses sight of the song. If you like Malmsteen, Joe Satriani and Steve Vai then I honestly think you'll love this album, I do.

Helen Bradley Owers

ANIDAY – 'ANIDAY' *(Valentine)* ROCK

Quality Female-Fronted Rock bands are few and far between these days. Older established acts like Robin Beck, Heart and Romeo's Daughter are successes that come to mind but of the newer acts only Halestorm really fall into the pure Rock genre rather than the Operatic Metal that is flavour of the day.

Step forward Aniday, a five-piece from Holland, fronted by the charismatic Maria Catharina (more widely known in Holland as Marlies Schuitemaker following a stint on Dutch Idols some ten years ago). Add a bit of a twist with the composer of eight of the songs on offer being none other than Robby Valentine and things start getting interesting.

This selection of twelve numbers oozes quality throughout. Catharina, with a vocal style not too dissimilar from Pink in her Rockier moments, shows her class from the outset with an outstanding threesome to open of 'Can't Take No More', 'Hole In My Heart' and especially the epic 'When Loving You Is Wrong' which virtually drips in emotion from the soul of Catharina.

Mostly backed by Valentine's master tapes from a previous and now defunct project Kyssmet, you can be sure that the production is massive and ultra-melodic with some killer riffs on offer too. There's barely a let up in pace or quality throughout although perhaps the bands very best selections are all stacked towards the start of the album with things slowing towards the end.

Maybe the Schuitemaker penned 'Not Much of A Man' and the eclectic 'Get Funky' would be better off separated in the running order but personal taste on the playlist can always change this. They also manage to save one of the best until last with the excellent 'Lost The Way' bringing the end to a thoroughly enjoyable, consistent and classy debut album.

If Female-Fronted Rock is your thing and you haven't yet come across Aniday you definitely want to be checking this one out.

Neil French

ASTRALION – 'ASTRALION' *(Limb)* POWER METAL

Ah Finland, land of snow and much drinking of b eer…Nightwish alerted us all to your presence and since then there's been plenty of first class Metal goodness pouring from your fjords (assuming you have fjords), with the oddly named Astralion joining the list with their impressive self-titled debut.

I have to say that I love it when an album starts off by kicking you in the bollocks and running away laughing. 'Mysterious & Victorious' is a tremendously fast opener, all a "billion miles an hour" drums and soaring vocals; a glorious mix of Helloween and Dragonforce. It doesn't quite get that raucous again, but there is a heady mix of tempos and attitude throughout that doesn't sacrifice the inherent Metal roots of the music. As musicians you've got to be tight to pull off decent Power Metal, and the lads in Astralion are no exception. They are led by the powerful vocals of Ian E Highhill, who has a rather typical voice for this sort of music and so suits it well.

Power and melody go hand in hand here, and I have to admire a band that is quite happy to put a demon/spider hybrid playing a big-ass guitar on their cover. It ain't perfect, but Astralion blend the guitars, drums, bass, keys and vocals together so it's just a genuinely beautiful noise. Expect to hear more of these guys, as I have a suspicion that they're not finished yet (although they are Finnish).

Alan Holloway

AXENSTAR – 'WHERE DREAMS ARE FORGOTTEN' *(Inner Wound)* POWER METAL

'Where Dreams Are Forgotten' is the sixth album from Sweden's Axenstar and they have decided, thankfully, to pull out all the stops for this new release. I say thankfully because on their last couple of albums it felt like this was (to my mind anyway) a band who had gone through a few personnel and line-up problems that had affected them so much that they just seemed to be going through the motions; the hunger and passion of their earlier releases was missing in action.

'…Forgotten' on the other hand sees that hunger return, with the band leaving their corner and coming out fighting with all guitars blazing. And as you listen to this newest release you can feel the energy returning to Axenstar's music and that always makes listening to Rock music a joy. So the minute 'Fear' explodes from your speakers, you can immediately hear the aggression and fervour again, that the band have re-discovered it and put it back into their music.

The whole album therefore is played at a fair old clip and songs such as 'Inside The Maze', the brutal melodic assault that is 'My Sacrifice', the pounding 'Curse Of The Tyrant', the brooding 'The Return' and the Iron Maiden meets Judas Priest sounding 'This False Imagery' sweep by in what seems like only a matter of minutes, but this only makes you want to play the whole thing over again.

I must also pay tribute to the band themselves; Magnus Winterwild on vocals and bass, Adam Lindberg on drums and Jens Klovegård and Joakim Johnsson on the guitars, who have (it's easy to hear it) worked their collective socks off to make this new album the best that it can possibly be.

It has been a bit of a golden year for Power Metal albums and Axenstar can take their place up there with the best of them. A great comeback release and it's nice to hear a great band once again firing on all cylinders.

Ian Johnson

BANDEMONIC – 'FIRES OF REDEMPTION *(Steel Gallery)* POWER METAL

Thanks to a rabid fan base with an insatiable appetite for all things heavy, fast and melodic, European Power Metal enjoys a camaraderie that few musical genres enjoy today. The unrelenting support from fellow bands and fans alike have proven enough to sustain a community and culture largely ignored by the masses and relegated to the fringes of the musical landscape.

However, with an ever-growing number of bands performing within this paradigm, staking ones claim becomes increasingly challenging. One such newcomer to the European Power Metal community is Greece's BanDemoniC. Their sound pays tribute to many respected giants of NWOBHM (Judas Priest, Iron Maiden, Raven), Power Metal (Helloween, Edguy, Hammerfall) and even Black Metal (Mercyful Fate).

George Manthos has an impressive range and achieves banshee-like wails which made the legendary Rob Halford famous. The drumming and riffing lock together with great precision and is a consistent highpoint throughout. Hailing from the land that hosted the first Olympic Games, it is hard not to draw comparison with another hometown hero in Firewind, one of the most accomplished and successful bands in the genre.

As much as BDC exudes a confidence on their first full-length album, their interpretation of Power Metal needs to slight adjustment in order to set themselves apart from the pack. The melodies could use some more structure and the siren-like vocals need to be placed more strategically in order to enhance the dramatic flair of the music. Although artwork (and linear notes) is all but forgotten in this day of mostly digital transmission of music, BDC thankfully spares nothing, as 'Fires Of Redemption' features exceptional cover art providing a visual which perfectly complements the music.

'Fires Of Redemption' possesses all of the trademarks that will undoubtedly resonate with all fans of European Power Metal. What's more, they have the talent to not only share the stage with the best of the lot, but BanDemoniC has the chance to grow substantially further on future releases.

Brent Rusche

FLYLEAF – 'BETWEEN THE STARS' *(earMUSIC/Loud & Proud)* MODERN/ ALTERNATIVE

I remember picking up the debut self-titled Flyleaf album a few years ago and though I could relate to the music, there was just something missing in terms of the sound and song quality for my liking; consequently it was resigned to the "never to be played again" pile. This meant I did not even bother with the sophomore release 'Memento Mori' and album number three 'New Horizons' and I probably would never have tracked this new album down so many thanks to the Reviews Ed for sending it my way.

I have read a large number of posts from Flyleaf fans bemoaning the fact original singer Lacey Sturm is no longer part of the band, having left to become a mother a couple of years ago. The arrival of new lead singer Kristen May has actually resulted in a change in style and though this change may attract many new fans, it may also alienate longstanding Flyleaf followers.

It is obvious from opening track 'Set Me On Fire' that the material is now more "radio friendly" and distinctly more Pop Rock than straight ahead Rock. The edginess has been replaced by something with a lot more polish and the hooks and melody lines are certainly a lot more immediate. The guitar still carries some crunch but some of the chugging riffs and power chords now form part of a more readily accessible musical framework.

The Christian undertones are underplayed but there are still a large number of underlying messages dealing with relationships and the challenges of life. The music has more in common now with Paramore circa 'Riot' and May sounds uncannily like Hayley Williams at times. 'Traitor' draws the closest comparison to the first three albums and the incendiary detail should appease those with an ear for something more caustic whilst 'Magnetic' could actually have come from Avril Lavigne's back catalogue and would make a great single.

The production of Don Gilmore (Linkin Park, Lacuna Coil, Pearl Jam) is crystal clear and each song is imbued with a clarity that allows great separation between instrumentation and also highlights May's soaring vocals. 'City Kids' is a personal favourite; from its lilting melancholy opening passages through the gut wrenching hook and guttural screams right to the sombre last note. Bonus track 'The Wedding' is possibly the heaviest track of all and again should keep the Flyleaf diehards happy. The album cover is slightly surreal, something of which Salvador Dali would be proud, but I'm still not sure of its relevance to the album title.

The change in direction is right up my street and 'Between The Stars' has been on constant rotation since it was played for the first time.

Dave Bott

BICOLOURED MEN – 'HYBRID' *(Records DK)* HEAVY METAL

Bicoloured Men have been around the scene for nigh on a decade yet 'Hybrid' represents the first fruits of their union. Formed in Bologna, Italy, by bassist Francesco Raimondi under the name of Puddles, the band went through numerous changes before settling on the current line-up along with a timely name change.

Drawing on the NWOBHM influences of early Iron Maiden and Judas Priest, BM have set their time machine to 1980 bypassing anything and everything that came later.

Musically there are some strong performances particularly in the riff department from guitarists Gianluca Ronco and Luca Bovarini creating a feel that wouldn't be out of place alongside the likes of Raven and Fist, yet despite this, there seems to be something not quite right and that may well be down to vocalist Emanuele Gulminelli.

His voice, at times, just doesn't seem to fit that well with the songs, his high pitched nasally vocals sounding like they have been recorded just a touch too fast which is a shame as on 'The Bloody Priest' everything falls into place, complete with a killer chorus, that the criminally overlooked Heavy Load would be proud of.

Overall 'Hybrid' isn't a bad album but some work on the vocal department could certainly have made their first effort more of a decent one.

Mick Burgess

BLACK FATE – 'BETWEEN VISIONS & LIES' *(Ulterium)* POWER METAL

You probably all know of my intense dislike for the bios that come with most promos these days, nine times out of ten they are just a waste of a tree's life and leave you scratching your head as to who writes the drivel contained in them. So when I read that Black Fate, a band formed in 1990 in Larissa Greece, played music that was a mixture of Kamelot and

'Flow' era Conception, I of course took said info with a large pinch of salt. Wonderfully however, this time the information seems to have been right on the nose and BF have indeed come up with an album that does remind you of those bands.

This comparison is really helped out by the fact that BF's vocalist Vasilis Georgiou sounds uncannily, at times, like Roy Khan and whose performance and contribution throughout this superb album is immeasurable. Thankfully for us, the rest of BF (Gus Drax guitars, Vasilis Liakos bass, Nikos Tsintzilonis drums) are also brilliant at what they do and the music they have created together made me want to play it again and again.

'Rhyme Of A False Orchestra' starts the proceedings and with its subtle nature and clever use of guitars and vocals, this one song sets out the band's proverbial musical wares. This intriguing beginning helps to portray a band who have lots of depth and passion running throughout their music and cuts like 'Lines In The Sand', 'The Game Of Illusion', the beautiful 'Into The Night' (which starts with a stunning vocal melody, that soon turns into a riff and hook that stays long after its finished playing), 'Perfect Crime' and the dark edged 'Weight Of The World' all closely follow this winning start. The intensity, musicality and class which you can hear in the interplay between the musician's just oozes from every pore of this recording and this makes sure that you are completely hypnotized until the last note of the album has faded.

Black Fate with 'Between Visions & Lies' have an album on their hands that could open a lot of doors for them. it's the kind of release you hear every now and then, one that just blows you away and it's also an album that I think you all should at least try to hear - even if it's only the once.

Ian Johnson

BLITZKRIEG – 'THE BOYS FROM BRAZIL STREET: 1981 REVISITED – THE ARCHIVES VOLUME ONE' *(Metal Nation)* HEAVY METAL

If you've heard fathers and older brothers waxing lyrical about the New Wave Of British Heavy Metal (or NWOBHM to cite its near unpronounceable acronym) and you want to know what all the fuss was about, you have various options. You could seek out the best major label exemplars of the genre; Saxon's 'Wheels Of Steel', Iron Maiden's eponymous debut or Diamond Head's 'Living On Borrowed Time' to name but three. Alternatively, you could seek out one of the many compilation albums featuring the brash, young guns of the day. Or you could spend your well earned bucks on 'The Boys From Brazil Street', a set of archive Blitzkrieg recordings, presented here as 'Volume One'.

Despite a second coming in the mid-1980s under the guidance of vocalist Brian Ross and the steady growth of a not insubstantial body of work since, Blitzkrieg are still best known for their influence on the fledgling Metallica. Lars Ulrich and co famously covered 'Blitzkrieg' itself – one of the outstanding tracks of the NWOBHM era and the track that opens this compilation with a touch of "hocus pocus".

'...Street' is, in fact, a collection of three sets; a three-track demo recorded in November 1980; a five-track session recorded for Neat Records in February 1981 and a further eight tracks recorded in a second session for Neat in May 1981. There is some repetition; 'Armageddon' features in all three sets, 'Blitzkrieg' features twice as does 'Inferno'. There are two versions of 'The Space Traveller'; one is an instrumental and the other a run through with a new lyric penned by Ross in the studio. Elsewhere, highlights include 'Calming The Savage Beast' and 'Take A Look Around', conclusive proof that Blitzkrieg were far more than the 'Buried Alive' single and its famous B-side. We are also treated, if that's the right word, to a 'Child in Time/Highway Star' medley that, if nothing else, brims with enthusiasm.

Although the quality is not comparable to a studio release – four of the songs were later recorded for the 1985 release 'A Time Of Changes' – there is much here that captures the spirit and excitement of the times. There is also much to suggest that Jim Sieroto was a talented guitarist and song-writer who could have gone on to bigger and better things.

'The Boys From Brazil Street' is a fascinating and nostalgic glimpse under the bonnet of one of the NWOBHM's most promising bands. It's not perfect by any means, but then the NWOBHM never was. It majored on power, speed and excitement with raw imperfection being part of its charm. The original Blitzkrieg never made it out of 1981. On the evidence presented here, they could and perhaps should have done.

Michael Anthony

BLOODBOUND – 'STORMBORN' *(AFM)* POWER METAL

(Bloodbound: A term that originates from the dark ages when men would make an oath to each other called a "Blood Oath" where they would cut their hands and then mix their blood. Each man then carries the other's blood, linking the two, as blood brothers. A bloodbound can never be broken and will follow you into the afterlife and beyond…)

The Metal juggernaut that is Bloodbound returns with album number six and if I just said that it was another in a long line of powerful anthemic Heavy Power Metal albums, then that would just be both rude and wrong. Bloodbound might play a form of Metal you've heard before, but what they also do is excel at it.

Throughout the eleven songs spread over this album, you will never find a dull moment. Instead you'll discover yourself wanting to throw up the devil horns and grab that tennis racket from out of the cupboard so you can join in with the band with a bit of air guitar mayhem; while you're doing all this, you'll find that you have a big grin of your face as you do so.

'Satanic Panic' sets things in motion and although it might be a daft (in a good way) title for a song, it Rocks and long before it ends you will find that you can sing the chorus as well as the band does. Then what follows over the next ten songs, is a master class in how to write, perform and sing METAL! So I challenge you all to check out 'Nightmares From The Grave' with its Celtic riffs and children's choir (which helps to lift this song to new heights), the memorable and hook laden 'We Raise The Dead' where again the chorus is contagious and tears at your throat trying to get you to sing-a-long with it, 'Blood Of My Blood' which is like being hit in the face by a runaway express train, the incendiary 'When The Kingdoms Will Fall' or the closing attack of 'Seven Hells' and 'When All Lights Fail' and then tell me that you haven't enjoyed the last forty odd minutes of Bloodbound's music.

So messers Patrik Johansson, Tomas Olsson, Fredrik Bergh, Pelle Åkerlind, Henrik Olsson and Anders Broman, please take a bow because as Power Metal albums go, this one is excellent. It's also one that has all the ticks, in all the right boxes and it will be played many times at Johnson towers and at such a volume that the neighbours will all come round to complain (and probably be ignored when they do).

Ian Johnson

FOREIGNER – 'THE BEST OF 4 AND MORE' *(Frontiers)* AOR

I was lucky enough to recently review the new Dennis DeYoung DVD/CD, which was an A/Z of wonderfully performed classic Styx hits. Now it's Foreigner's turn to do something quite similar as they have decided to record this album in celebration of the anniversary of the '4' album's initial release. 'The Best Of 4 And More' does just what it says on the tin; what you get to hear is almost an hour and a half of classic Hard Rock and AOR songs... ones that shaped our lives...tracks that you find yourself marvelling at because of their depth and brilliance. In a nutshell this is – Foreigner performs the best songs from '4' with some of their other classic Hard Rock gems thrown in.

That would however be a massive injustice to this wonderful band and album because they were on fire when they took to the stage at the Borgata Hotel's Music Box Theatre. The whole group, from Mick Jones downwards, play as if their very lives depended on them doing a great show and with the added luxury of having a singer like Kelly Hansen (who has never sounded better) belting out the songs...you soon find yourself in musical hog heaven.

What also becomes evident as you continue to listen is that even though Foreigner became known as a ballad band, they really knew how to write and perform fantastic Hard Rock tracks, songs that stir your musical soul and have you fist pumping the air along too them. Just look at the tracks for the proof you need that they know how to Rock. From the first album we have 'Feels Like The First Time' and 'Cold As Ice' and from 'Double Vision' there's 'Hot Blooded'. When it comes to '4' you'll find the band blasting out 'Night Life', an epic version of 'Juke Box Hero', 'Break It Up', 'Waiting For A Girl Like You', 'Woman In Black', 'Girl On The Moon' and 'Urgent' replete with superb Saxophone solo. From 'Agent Provocateur' there's a barnstorming version of 'I Want To Know What Love Is' with a full gospel choir backing Hansen, and finally the wonderful 'Say You Will' from the 'Inside Information' album.

So if great songs and performances isn't enough, the album itself has been recorded using Hi-Definition production techniques and it sounds absolutely incredible. With its rich powerful audio, this album will be something that you just have to hear for yourselves, to get the best from it.

Foreigner have the songs and musicianship to keep you entertained, enthralled and enraptured throughout and lovers of timeless music should, by hook or crook, get hold of a copy as soon as possible because it's really that good.

Ian Johnson

BORN OF FIRE – 'DEAD WINTER SUN' *(Pure Steel)* PROGRESSIVE

Releasing two albums in the early 2000s, I must admit that powering Progressive Metallers Born Of Fire (bonus points for the awesome band name) completely passed me by, although I wonder why when you take into account their excellent comeback album 'Dead Winter Sun'. Hailing from Phoenix, Arizona, there's no doubting that BOF are an American act, their surging sound harking back to prime-era Queensryche, especially through new vocalist Gordon Tittsworth (All Too Human, Dread The Forsaken, Images Of Eden), who could, these days, probably out Geoff Tate the ostracised ex-front-man of the Ryche.

Not everything hits the mark as it should, mid-paced numbers 'Spiritual Warfare' and the album opening title track never quite delivering on their initial promise and yet when things are accelerated up a gear, BOF become a raging inferno. 'When Hope Dies' crackles and pops (no snap though), guitarists Bobby Chavez and Victor Morell challenging drummer Steve Dorssom and bassist Michael Wolff to a full-pelt time changing duel.

However this is a band of extremes, 'Echoes Of The Lost' slowing things right down, strings and piano infusing a heady atmosphere into a song that stops you in your tracks through crafted arrangements and another soaring vocal. The closing track 'Tears' is a glorious blend of classical guitar and tasteful keyboards, ending proceedings in an extremely classy fashion.

BOF make for a searing change of pace from the full-pelt, kick drums ahoy that Euro Power Metal can too often offer, '...Sun' evoking bands such as Fates Warning, Crimson Glory and Queensryche. That alone sets them out as a little different to the norm these days, as do bleak lyrics which investigate how our world came to be the shambles that it basically is; although a little hope is added along the way. A 2012 'Anthology' looks to be a required purchase to discover what early Born Of Fire sounded like (with a different singer, Jim Davis (Monument)). If it's half as good as 'Dead Winter Sun', it will be well worth toasting your marshmallows to.

Steven Reid

BREACHING VISTA – 'VERA CITY' *(Brightside)* MODERN/ALTERNATIVE

Vera City' is a Soft Rock album with hints of Indie by Ontario-based band Breaching Vista; unfortunately, it's just a little boring.

Instrumental intro 'We Are The Way' sets the tone for the rest of the album but rarely is it exciting, surprising or explorative. Songs like 'Nervous' and 'Wrath Of Nyre' are so drawn out that they lose their structure and ultimately, the listener.

And these songs aren't exactly clustered in one place on the album so you can conveniently skip them; they are littered throughout with only a couple of tracks like 'Give Me A Reason' to really add any pace or memorable riffs.

There are elements of Kings Of Leon on 'Forgive You' and the album has heavy resonances of that genre but lacking a signature sound, and, going by the picture on the album, they lack a hard-hitting image too.

One positive is the down-to-earth vocals, especially those on 'Letters', a song about the armed forces and one frequently played in Canada on Remembrance Day. Closing track 'Little Thoughts' has a bit more of the energy that this band actually seems to thrive on, but they just don't use it enough.

A rather non-descript album as a whole, without enough personality or punch.

Sophie Brownlee

BRYAN ADAMS – 'TRACKS OF MY YEARS' *(Polydor)* ROCK

It appears nowadays that when ageing Pop/Rock stars reach a certain juncture in their lives, there are three roads available to them; a) they can continue to travel down that well-trodden route in search of that one last classic album (or at least one that recaptures the magic of their heyday); b) they can retire gracefully and move into TV presenting, travelling the world and meeting under-privileged children in third world countries, or; c) redirect their talents and start recording music that will connect with an older, conservative audience. We've already seen how successful Rod Stewart, Robbie Williams, and most recently Annie Lennox have become in regurgitating the past; now it's Bryan Adams' turn in the retro spotlight.

The Canadian croaker, who has produced such seminal albums as 'Cuts Like A Knife', 'Reckless' and 'Waking Up The Neighbours', now bestows upon us 'Tracks Of My Years', his first studio release since 2008's '11'. Under the label of a "covers" album this could well be the beginning of the end for Adams; I hope not, but it's not looking promising.

'Tracks...' consists of eleven songs that were apparently influential throughout his fifty-five years, but if you are expecting a blistering set of up-tempo ageless Rockers, then think again. An initial glance at the track-listing does little to instil enthusiasm.

The album opener, The Beatles' 'Any Time At All' gives false hope of what is to come; it's delivered with verve, but all the instrumentation sounds rather insipid; the only saving grace is Adams' instantly recognizable vocal delivery which thankfully is on top form throughout. Yes, there are some instantly recognizable classics; Dylan's 'Lay Lady Lay', The Beach Boys' 'God Only Knows' and Smokey Robinson's 'The Tracks Of My Tears' (from which the album title is derived), and yes, they are faithful renditions, but they lack a certain "je ne sais quoi", or in X Factor lingo, "something that makes them his own"! 'Rock And Roll Music', originally covered by the legendary Chuck Berry, is another that offers just a little bit more than "average". There is one new song however; co-written with Jim Vallance, 'She Knows Me' is a mid-tempo, semi-acoustic affair that sits comfortably with the rest of the album's mediocre fayre.

As with most mainstream albums of this ilk, there is of course a deluxe edition available which contains another five songs for your delight and delectation; 'C'mon Everybody' by Eddie Cochran and Kris Kristofferson's 'Help Me Make It Through The Night' are the most identifiable. Staunch fans will no doubt snap this up; parents and grandparents will probably enjoy it; the remainder…try before you buy!

Dave Crompton

BURNING BLACK – 'REMISSION OF SIN' *(Limb)* HEAVY METAL

Whilst Italy may be better known for Opera and Classical Music, Burning Black are solid evidence of a healthy Metal scene too. Having been around since 2008, 'Remission Of Sin' is their third album, packed full of Power Metal riffing, some excellent lead work and in Dan Ainlay, a vocalist who can hit notes in the Rob Halford range when required. All the elements for a great album are here and yet overall I just don't think they have nailed it – yet.

The short atmospheric instrumental of 'Do Lung Bridge' sets the scene before the battery of 'Mercenary Of War' kicks in with strong riffs combined with a touch of melody underneath from some subtle keyboards. With a lengthy harmony lead section there's even a nod towards the sound of Fireworks fave Rockers Ten when they hit full throttle. 'Flag Of Rock' is more straight-forward Rock with a catchy, anthem-like chorus before 'Crucified Heart' (a highlight of the album) with its pure Power Metal driving drum rhythms akin to the Judas Priest classic 'Rapid Fire'.

Ainlay's vocals are raw and gritty, full of aggressive intent and thankfully they know how to use his range without any overkill screaming just for the sake of it. 'Spaceman's Theory' is another short, semi-acoustic instrumental leading into more powerful guitar work from Chris Jeremy and Eric Antonello, with 'Far Away' and 'True Metal Jacket' in particular providing a strong finish to the album.

Yet despite all the positives there's just something lacking overall. I've listened to the album five or six times for the review with no real faults and would happily hear it again, but once 'Remission Of Sin' comes off the playlist and back in the box, I don't think there's enough to really draw you back to it; no nagging riff or monster chorus that really embeds itself in your brain. Live, I'm sure Burning Black will kick up a storm and would be a great watch around the Metal festivals of Europe. Good and consistent they may be, but they haven't quite found the spark to stand out and give any sort of longevity to the album.

Ian Parry

BURNT BELIEF – 'ETYMOLOGY' *(Alchemy)* PROGRESSIVE

Bassist Colin Edwin, best known for his work with Porcupine Tree, and guitarist Jon Durant are at it again. Having first collaborated on Durant's 2011 album 'Dance Of The Shadow Planets', they came together in 2012 as Burnt Belief, releasing their "distance recorded" eponymous debut.

'Etymology' is the follow-up, an album (so it sez 'ere) of "progressive ethno-ambient fusion instrumentals". It's a slick and classy affair, a perception immediately borne out by ice cool opener 'Chromatique'. Similarly, 'Rivulet' features clean, soaring guitar work from Durant and some super bass from Edwin – the best example on the album, perhaps, of the two musicians complementing each others' playing perfectly.

My personal favourites are 'Dissemble' and 'Squall', both of which are Eastern-tinged, courtesy of the electric violin work of classical musician Steve Bingham (who is also known for his contributions to Art Rock band No-Man). Worthy of note too, is the presence of no less than three drummers – Vinny Sabatino, Dean McCormick and Jose Duque – whose efforts enhance the programmed electronic rhythms.

One thing you can say for 'Etymology' is that more often than most albums, the song titles do largely reflect the nature of the music. For example, the aforementioned 'Chromatique' is sleek, and modern, 'Hover' just kind of hovers, 'Chymera' is difficult to get hold of, 'Precis' kind of comes and goes quickly, as précised material should, and album closer 'Squall' is pretty squally, like the showers they sometimes announce on the BBC (the exception, perhaps, is 'Not Indifferent', which says 'Indifferent' to me).

Sometimes soporific, but more frequently soothing and calming, 'Etymology' is an arty affair that doubtless has significant muso appeal. You ain't gonna be dancing to it, but it's certainly music to chill to. It's also the kind of music you can play when you're doing the ironing (skip the soporific tracks). I know because I've tried it... it helps you get through shirts quicker. And if, like me, you do your thinking while you're ironing, it's also good music to think along to. Nice.

Michael Anthony

FYRE! – 'MISSY POWERFUL' *(AFM)* HARD ROCK

The canon of Hard Rock music isn't overly populated with Female-Fronted ensembles. However, many a successful band have managed to emerge over the decades (especially recently) from Heart and Evanesence to Epica and Nightwish, all of whom are worthy of standing shoulder-to shoulder with their all-male counterparts. Fyre! is a newcomer to the scene yet poised to ignite the Hard Rock community with 'Missy Powerful', their explosive debut album.

Featuring vocalist, guitarist, song-writer and founder Alejandra Burgos, her influences are the distillation of singers including Joan Jett, Pat Benatar, Sandi Saraya, Robin Beck and yes, even Faith Hill! Fyre! is the sole product of her many years of travelling and touring the world. Burgos built a following with performing in her native country of Argentina before moving to Europe to further evangelize her brand of Hard Rock.

Friendships developed and a culturally diverse band was slowly amassed to include German bassist Lars Ratz, Spanish guitarist Tolo Grimalt and Spanish drummer Sergi Tomas. While possessing memorable hooks as well as superb musicianship, the songs are simply stated and encapsulate everything that is expected of a song that Rocks as hard as it is accessible.

To add depth and complexity, the use of woodwinds, strings and keyboards are all represented with clever, artistic restraint which create additional colours and textures to an already strong album. Although a bold move for any band, the album closes with a cover of Led Zeppelin's classic 'Stairway To Heaven'. Albeit a convincing rendition, its omission would not detract from the already impressive nature of the album's original material.

Fyre! is absolutely poised to deliver a stunning album with 'Missy Powerful.' You are left with nothing left to do but take the album for another spin.

Brent Rusche

CETI – 'BRUTUS SYNDROME' *(Metal Mind)* HEAVY METAL

From their late 1980s Hard Rock beginnings to the successful collaborations with a Symphonic orchestra, the Polish Rock/Metal act CETI have been ever changing, but what always remained stable about them was the extraordinary quality of their musicianship. Starting from the band's founders, charismatic front-man Grzegorz Kupczyk and classically trained keyboardist/singer Maria 'Marihuana' Wietrzykowska, the strength of their line-ups was an indisputable fact throughout the twenty five years of their tenure. After numerous personal changes and having trodden many a musical path, CETI now returns with their fifteenth album entitled 'Brutus Syndrome'.

A deafening drum roll opens the first track 'Fight To Kill' which is fuelled by fiery guitar riffs. 'Wizards Of The Modern World' electrifies with its breakneck pace somewhere along the border between the classic Heavy and Speed Metal; it is one of many proofs throughout the entire album that Kupczyk still remains the finest Polish voice of the genre. 'Devil Made Me Do It' with its Dio-esque style is followed by 'Master Of Dull' which is another feisty gallop embroidered with a melodic guitar solo. 'The Evil And The Troy' gravitates more towards Power Metal aesthetics with its harmonic vocals and numerous instrumental duels and interludes. 'The Song Will Remain' is raw verses heavily contrasted with powerful, melodic choruses, making it one of the album's highlights. Another highlight – yet of different nature – is 'Somethin' More'; an acoustic slow-ish track gradually building up into a grandiose power ballad that may remind you of Whitesnake's gem 'Sailing Ships' (from their 'Slip Of The Tongue' album). Similarly to its predecessor, 'Second Sin' also features a mellow acoustic intro – but only for it to morph into a heavy, keyboard-laden Metal piece further on. 'Sons Of Brutus' and the final selection 'Run To Nowhere' are no worse than the rest of the material with an abundance of grand six string licks and the excellent work of the rhythm section against some really impressive vocals.

CETI's return with '...Syndrome' is nothing but a triumphant one – there isn't a better way to commemorate the 25th anniversary of the band's foundation than releasing an album that is another milestone of their works. Heavy and guitar-laden, but also tastefully melodic, 'Brutus Syndrome' is a brilliant compromise between the contemporary production and the classic Metal sound. It also portrays the musicians in excellent shape – and with an apparent excess of musical ideas that resulted in them releasing not only a full album, but also two additional singles with some unreleased rarities (one of them being 'Game Of Love' that features an impressive vocal duo between Kupczyk and Alessandro Del Vecchio). Highly recommended and a valuable addition to your Metal album collection.

Alexandra Mrozowska

CONFESS – 'JAIL' *(SG)* HARD ROCK

'Jail' is the full-length debut by Swedish band Confess who I admit were a complete unknown to me. First time I played 'Jail', it was on nice and loud and I went off to paint a wall; a minute or two later, I put down that paintbrush. 'Relationshit' was awesome, high octane Sleazy Punk and just what I like from Sleazy Swedes. I sent a YouTube link to some Sleaze loving friends and asked "have you heard of them?"...the response was also "no" followed quickly by "holy shit, why haven't I?"...so it wasn't just me then!

'Scream' is fairly typical of the genre, they reminded me a little of early Skid Row and the little known Trash. 'Pay Before I Go' has an Americana feel but is also Thrashy and fun, there's some really nice dual guitars on this album and the musicianship is a cut above many others in the genre. The songs are well crafted too; there honestly isn't one on the album I dislike. The ballad 'Take Aim' is choral and orchestral although it has to be said there are no loving, smoochy lyrics on this album, it's the blacker shade of pale; 'Bloodstained Highway' being a case in point.

John Elliot has a strong voice that suits the songs and has enough strength to extend notes and screams that many cop out from. Put this together with a rather powerhouse rhythm section and you realise this is actually a rather talented band. I love the quirky sounds they throw in, such as an Irish jig in the middle of 'Setting Sails'. What makes music a "genre" is a similarity in sound and this is no exception, but they constantly throw you off course with a real Metal riff or full-on harmonies.

It's difficult to pick a favourite track but 'Got Lucky' is a contender; I can't really explain why but it drives along and comes in with a lighter waving, audience participation chorus. 'Cardiac

Arrest' is riffy, 'Get Me Down' would be a great set starter/finisher (a good, honest Rock 'n' Roll track) and 'Intervention (Sin and Tonic Pt 2)' is a nod towards Scandinavian Symphonic with a harder edge. On reflection regarding a favourite track, I have to say I might just plump for the closer 'What's Love Got To Do With It' (yes... from Tina Turner). Covers can go either way, they can fail miserably or the band can put their own stamp on it and make it an awesome song in its own right; Confess pull off the latter.

If you like Skid Row, Crashdiet, Hardcore Superstar or Reckless Love, I think you may write me a thank you note for bringing Confess to your attention.

Helen Bradley Owers

CRAZY LIXX – 'CRAZY LIXX' *(Frontiers)* HARD ROCK

Let me be brutally honest, I thought that the last Crazy Lixx album, 'Riot Avenue', was a big pile of sheep droppings (sorry if you liked it). Personally I didn't like the songs, I didn't like the production and dropping f-bombs almost every other word got boring fast.

Thankfully someone in the band must have been psychic because they appear to have listened to my negative thoughts and in turn recorded an album that is streets ahead of '… Avenue' in every single way. The production is richer and more vibrant, the musicianship tighter and each and every song Rocks big time.

Check out the KISS-influenced 'Sound Of The Loud Minority', 'Hell Raising Woman' or 'Girls Of The 80's' for starters and you'll find a band who have really sat down together and decided to write and record an album full of fun, catchy as measles songs that will obliterate the memory of the last album in one fell swoop.

That they can then continue to Rock your world with further Melodic gems, such as 'I Missed The Mark', the Punky, attitude filled 'All Looks, No Hooks' and the hook-laden 'Heroes Are Forever' says a lot for a band, who I thought had dropped a clanger with their last album.

Also finishing the whole thing with the amazing fast paced 'Wrecking Ball Crew' is a stroke of genius because too many times these days bands round things off with a ballad; this never sits right with me because I always think a Rocker to end an album always leaves you wanting more. So CL hit you straight between the eyes with a song that has everything a Hard Rock fan could ever want – which is guitars, Guitars, GUITARS and a hook that would frighten a Killer Whale into submission.

Crazy Lixx have banished any bad memories I had of them with this new album and I'm so glad that they have. This new release is going to blow your proverbial socks off – bad year for music…? As the television character Jim Royle would say, "my arse!"

Ian Johnson

DANGER – 'DANGER' *(State)* HARD ROCK

Simplistic it may be, but this is plenty of fun. Danger doesn't say much about themselves, but there's a party going on here and it would be great to get an invite. Riffs are Hairy and Sleazy, the beats are big, the bass throbbing, the vocals are saucy and the choruses could be sung for a week.

Yes, it's all been done before, but this has a spark which renders it more than just a nostalgia trip. 'D.C.A. Hollywood' shows softer Hair, 'Body To Body' runs to the Van Halen playbook and uses it judiciously enough that by the time we're left thinking "was that Van Halen?", it's all over in a swath of empty bottles and sticky furniture. Michael Monroe has to be referenced of course and on 'Rockstar' the bubblegum popping "nah nah nah's" and gorgeous open solo do him proud.

Of course some of this is off the peg, but never is it tired. The album photos are so Motley Poison and they try so hard to have a good time that it's difficult to not be swept up in it. Rob Nasty, Jesse Kid, Mackey Gee and Rob Paris have the ability to deliver and the time to enjoy it. Dumb, young, and as likeable as a kiss from an old lover.

Steve Swift

GAELERI – 'GATES OF ROME' *(TBM/Roastinghouse)* MELODIC ROCK

After twelve years of silence, the Swedish Melodic Rock band Gaeleri are back... finally. In fact, Gaeleri – very unfortunately I must say – have never attracted a great deal of attention. They released their debut 'Gallery' in 1996 followed by 'Still There' in 1999 and – at the time – their last record 'A Brighter Day' in 2002.

'Gates Of Rome' comes along with ten really catchy, traditional AOR songs and indeed a lot of elements, guitar-sounds and even the mixing sounds a lot like good old Foreigner or other similar 1980s band. '...Rome' opens with 'Ready Or Not', it's the kind of track that only makes you want more; well-composed and "not overdone" guitar riffs... a great opener. 'Let Your Love Bleed', 'Time Has Come' and 'No Boundaries' come along with awesome solos with that typical and incomparable sound we know from the 1980's. Very good lyrics, pounding beats all mixed up with Bluesy or sometimes Progressive elements and accompanied by the absolutely special voice of Anders Vindhav. These all combine to create a selection of classical-influenced and entertaining Rock songs; however I definitely have to stress that Gaeleri are anything but another fish in the ocean!

Title track 'Gates Of Rome' and 'Entertain You' really caught my attention since the Progressive parts, together with the melodies of the guitars and vocals and certain repetitive AOR-like sounding parts, become an almost hypnotic mixture. 'Wannabe' increases its power throughout the progression of the song and although it starts rather roughly, it develops as the song plays and is further proof that Gaeleri's tracks are absolutely unpredictable. 'Queen Of Time' is a true ear-catcher and exactly that kind of track that would have been a big hit in the 1980s. As a very emotional – especially regarding the lyrics – and beautifully composed track, I have to mention 'One Touch'; the words and the melody may just go straight into your heart. 'One Step Closer' is another very soft and wonderful "dream-yourself-away" offering owing to its very special (and not cheesy) sound which is obtained through the fabulous vocals, lyrics and song-writing in general.

The only little downer about this record – and please forgive me for mentioning it since the album is a killer – is that the mixing sounds slightly rough. As if the vocals were added to the final mix afterwards; they don't seem to merge with the other instruments. The outcome of this is that, while listening, I sometimes wished for a more "complete" sound since the songs themselves really blew me away.

Irrespective of this minor gripe, 'Gates Of Rome' is a fantastic comeback album that should be bought and heard.

Julia Braun

DEAN WALLACE – 'METAL FAMILY' *(Tinplho/Send The Wood)* HEAVY METAL

With 'Metal Family' being his debut, Dean Wallace is not a name of worldwide recognition – not yet perhaps, as the potential for a change in this state of affairs is definitely there. Wallace, a diehard aficionado of Metallica, Megadeth and Iron Maiden, has released an album that's a handful of aggressive Thrash-infused riffs against some rough melodies, blending the richness of his influences all together.

The opening track 'Get Away From My Home' is characterized by the interesting changes of pace – from the slow, monumental intro to the aggressive, Thrash Metal-infused verses and choruses. Despite its heaviness, 'Our Only Chance' is considerably more melodic than its predecessor, an excellent piece of music that blends a contemporary Metal sound with the best traditions of the genre. 'The New Slavery' introduces a crushing, muscular riff against the background of a bustling rhythm section work with Wallace displaying yet another convincing James Hetfield vocal impersonation. With 'I'm Not A Hero' be prepared to have your ears assaulted with a machine gun riff that nevertheless leaves enough space within the song for some raw melody. In the heavy, lumbering riff that drives 'It's My Turn', some distant echoes of Black Sabbath are to be heard, while the intense shredding towards the end of the track is again somewhere along the border between Heavy and Thrash Metal. 'The Ferryman Of Soul' is again a bit more melodic, yet not deprived of meaty, aggressive riffs that are the album's overall trademark. A ballad 'My Eternal Why' follows in its monumental, sombre manner – an excellent example of how to slow down pace and not wander off the beaten track towards the undesired cheesiness. 'Flying Coffin' explodes with a kind of Progressive Metal vibe that also has a Maiden-esque panache to it before developing into another furious Speed Metal gallop further on. Some echoes of Maiden are to be heard in the aggressively chanted 'Headshot' as well and the finale 'Metal Family' which also has some anthemic quality to it.

In terms of comparison, Dean Wallace will not avoid being equated to Metallica and, guessing by the list of artists he considers particularly influential towards his style, it's the sound aesthetics he strives for anyway. With clear inclinations for a balance between a heaviness and melody, it's perhaps more of 'Black Album'-era Metallica than their raw beginnings that gave birth to the entire Thrash Metal genre. Still, it's the album the majority of Metallica fans would have given a much warmer welcome than any of the recent endeavours of their actual heroes. It's a fine piece of aggressive-sounding Heavy Metal with influences of Thrash and Speed genres, and one worth checked out.

Alexandra Mrozowska

DIAMANTE – 'AD VITAM REDITUS' *(Atomic Stuff)* HARD ROCK

Don't let the fact that the band sing in their native Italian put you off if you're a fan of sturdy 1970's Rock like Uriah Heep and Deep Purple. It's also got a nice dose of Italian Prog (1970's style) thrown in to give it character. Nico Sala has a good voice that holds your attention and he has enough power not to be outgunned by the rest of the band. The guitar deals out some satisfying meaty riffs and there's lengthy, fluid soloing whilst the keyboards also have a solid old-school feel.

'Il Pagliaccio' is a powerful start with a riff that's a distant cousin to Audioslave's 'Cochise'; it manages to sound retro and contemporary at the same time. 'Vedi Fratello' has a good hook and shows that they've got some song-writing flair. The cover of the famous Italian musician Angelo Branduardi's 'Ballo In Fa Diesis Minore' is one of the standouts. It has a distinctly Baroque flavour, with a Folk edge and a strong lead guitar. You can't help but conjure up men with pointy beards and Blackadder frilly collars listening to this one.

It's Heep territory on 'Io Sono...E Sarò' with a modern angular riff that gives way to swirling Hammond Organ. 'Respirare Te' is also Organ assisted but with a marvellous wailing guitar solo. 'Non Resisto' has a keyboard solo and a more Progressive edge. Although I could follow the lyrics, they are fairly abstract so you're not missing much if you can't. The closing 'Ballata Del Buon Vino', written by their previous keyboard player, has a Folky, sing-along feel that suits a song celebrating wine.

Indeed, if you fancy a decent wine with a 1970's vintage but can't read the label then this is worth taking a chance on.

Duncan Jamieson

DIMENSION – 'REVOLUTION' *(Nightmare)* PROGRESSIVE

The thought of a double-disc set from the Denver-based power trio who make up Dimension may well appear a daunting proposition. It's the third album from the three-piece whose basic guitar/bass/drums line-up is supplemented by a lot of keyboards for an album which is ambitious in its concept with song-writing that is grounded in the roots of Prog Metal.

The classical piano opening of 'The Source' is accompanied by a leaden riff and leads into the first of those distinctive squealing guitar interjections which start to become familiar through the record. Before long, vocalist David Quicho is showing his mettle with some Bruce Dickinson-like Operatic vocal-siren leanings and there's some impressive interplay between the three instruments with all the time-shifting trickery you'd expect from Prog Metallers. The first single 'Pale Horse' ensues that the album conveys enough impact within its opening to grab the attention before a Classical interlude with the waltz (not surprisingly) which introduces 'The Waltz Of Death' before fading into a maelstrom of three instruments that supply a battery of sound.

However, there's a shift in gear with 'New Day' which takes Dimension more towards power ballad territory with, what it has to be said, is quite a catchy and melodic piece – perhaps the most accessible track on the album, yet it's the second disc which leans towards the more Progressive side of the band. This is where you'll find the centrepiece of the album in the close to twenty minutes of 'War Dream' – all sequenced sounds in its opening of confusion in the aftermath of war. It's a large-scale and elaborate piece moving through

GANDALF'S FIST – 'A FOREST OF FEY' *(Independent)* PROGRESSIVE

Gandalf's Fist have flitted around in the background of the Prog scene for quite some time now. However with 2013's 'A Day In The Life Of A Universal Warrior', the Fist made their presence truly felt; countless positive reviews and much internet chatter thoroughly deserved as a convoluted space-based concept piece hit the mark musically and lyrically. At that stage, the band were still a duo of Dean Marsh (vocals/guitars/mandolin/keys/bass) and Luke Severn (vocals/lyrics) however with the addition of drummer Stefan Hepe and bassist Chris Ewan, GF are now a fully-fledged band.

Interestingly for this quick fire follow-up, apart from on one track, 'The World We Created', Severn limits himself to backing vocals, Melissa Hollick being the main voice you'll hear across 'A Forest Of Fey'; it's a bold move but one which reaps rewards with Hollick being perfect for the "adult" fairytale told – a girl lost in the woods, who encounters all manner of other beings and events – all of which may sound twee but is executed with real skill.

Musically things are bolstered by luminaries such as Clive Nolan (Arena), Troy Donockley (Nightwish) and amongst others Matt Stevens, while It Bites/Arena man John Mitchell provides a trademark vocal to 'Stories Old And Stories Told (Of Children Brave And Children Bold)'. However none of these cameos overshadow the main event; a mix of Traditional Prog and a Neo influence combining with touches of Folk and some amazingly catchy choruses.

The album's title track, 'The World We Created' and 'Forest Rose (Coming Home)' prove particularly memorable and yet it is the overall atmosphere of wonder, claustrophobia, threat and release which continually draw you back for more. Voice actress Alicia Arthur also deserves special mention, her contributions at the beginning and end of the album bringing a pleasing BBC Radio4 "Play For Today" feel to the short spoken sections, which in the wrong hands could have been cringe-worthy.

The ending of the story is ambiguous, does the girl return to the "real world" or stay in the forest? No one is really sure, but what is certain is that Gandalf's Fist have created another cracker here, for the Forest Of Fey may not be what it appears but it is a spellbinding place to visit.

Steven Reid

different sections with a keyboard-led battle midway through before a period of calm leads towards an unexpectedly subtle ending to the track and indeed the album.

Tagged onto the end of each disc are 'Eleanor Rigby' and 'Immigrant Song' which need no introduction, yet the only question is why? Particularly in the case of the latter which follows the epic '...Dream', set up to be the big production piece on the record. There's enough promise in their own song-writing to not have to resort to filling out an album which is just too long for a single disc. Some may argue that with a little careful editing, the material may have been able to be down to a more immediate single disc.

That aside, there's much more to Dimension than you'd expect from a three-piece and they can sit comfortably with their peers – the likes of Dream Theater and Symphony X – presenting more than just simple Metal and fully justifying the "Progressive" tag.

Mike Ainscoe

DOOMOCRACY – 'THE END IS WRITTEN' *(Steel Gallery)* HEAVY METAL

'The End Is Written' is the title of the debut album by Doomocracy from Heraklion City (island of Crete, Greece). The band delivers Doom Metal in the vein of bands like Solitude, Aeturnus, Candlemass, Memento Mori and Veni Domine. Needless to say there is nothing pink and fluffy on offer here folks!

Opening number 'Sadness & Hesitation' has plenty of blood and thunder, bass drum kicks and guitars grind together, and the voice of Michael Stavrakakis is quite Operatic which suits the music, though I did find it a little one-dimensional at times.

The sordid guitar riff on 'Faceless' makes this an atmospheric piece and although it lacks any real clear melody, it still penetrates.

The wonderfully titled 'Doormacht (Der Apokalytische Untergang)' offers slick percussion and super depressive guitars. Its musical template is based on a mood of discontent and intricate time changes. On 'The Celephais Curse', the band packs in a wealth of ideas and the more Progressive influence serves the song well.

Doomocracy covers a great many terrains, yet retains a strong signature sound throughout the album. Keeping the song count to eight is to be applauded, as the less-is-more approach means each individual song can blast to the surface.

Ray Paul

EMPIRE 21 – 'EMPIRE 21' *(Independent)* HARD ROCK

Empire 21 was an idea/band put together by Darkwater/Harmony drummer Tobias Enbert and former Narnia vocalist German Pascual whilst they were touring together in 2009. When Narnia decided to call it a day, the two asked CJ Grimmark to join E21 and the band was effectively born. During the initial recording sessions Pascual parted company with the band, which left them with a big hole to fill. Luckily for them (and us), they soon found newcomer and powerhouse vocalist Ricard Hulteke, who does an outstanding job on the album's songs. These are songs which the band readily admits that they worked on until they got everything to sound just right. In places the music is (as you can probably imagine) a bit like Narnia, a bit like Harmony and a bit like Darkwater but it also has a wonderful Progressive Metal edge that gives the band an identity all of its own.

Now some of you might be worrying that E21 (with these members) are a Christian act, which I know some people have a problem with, especially lyrically. To be honest that is exactly what they are, however there are no overtly Christian references in the lyrics, no "praising Jesus" (nothing wrong with that) so you can sit back and enjoy the music for what it is; which is powerful Melodic Metal with strong Progressive overtones along with some stunning musicianship thrown in.

'When You're Falling', 'I Can't' and 'All Is Lost' start the album off with a bang. All three have huge hooks, big guitars and in Grimmark, E21 has a guitarist who really knows his way around a fret-board. They are also three perfect songs to show off the vocals of Hulteke who, as I mentioned above, is a real find. His powerful and melodic voice nails every melody that can be found with ease, which only makes you want to keep listening to see what he will come up with next.

Title track 'Empire 21' has an explosive riff and hits hard as does the modern sounding '100 Nights', whilst on the highly melodic tracks 'Would You' and 'This Is My Story', you'll find Hulteke, Grimmark, Enbert, Andreas Ålöv (bass) and John Svensson (keyboards) playing like musical demons (or should that be angels?); their musicianship bringing all the best things from their music to the fore.

As debut albums go this is pretty damn impressive. With its frenetic pacing and strong songs that never let up from beginning to end, this album will hopefully be the start of something big for Empire 21.

Ian Johnson

ESTATE – 'FANTASIA' *(Mighty)* HEAVY METAL

Like their homeland, these five generate a huge and expansive sound. 'Estate' are five "Metallers" from Mother Russia and 'Fantasia' is their very first recorded musical statement.

Yes, this is Heavy Metal. Yes, this collection is not your typical sounding Heavy Metal group. And yes, these five are worthy of your ear! Mixing elements of hardened Metal with straight Rock and a sprinkling of Russian Folk music and folklore, Estate are making an exceptional creation in music, building a brawny foundation within the realm of Metaldom!

They sing about valour, honour and mystical heroes and their music portrays the same emotional and, at times, atmosphere. With titles such as 'Silent Dream', 'The War', and 'Holy Land', expect a complete adventure within the eleven tracks on 'Fantasia' almost like a poignant movie starts to reveal itself! In my reviews I often use descriptive words such as epic and majestic, these and other descriptive words should be used liberally throughout any review of 'Estate's music…their compositions are certainly epic and majestic. Although they are a Metal group, the music is very melodic and of course up-tempo (in most places). It is also hard and furious and when these five show their Folksy side, well you must hear it!

No strangers to the road, Estate have many live performances under their belt – especially when you consider as a band they are really only two years old! In Russia, they are very well known and that will spread throughout the continent during 2015 I suspect!

Meshing the guitars and keyboards seamlessly, giving us that driving rhythm and surrounding everything with a Neo-Classical bend, are five very accomplished and classically trained musicians. Aleksey Seleznev on guitar, Dmitriy Efimov on keyboards are joined by the fierce rhythm section of Nikolai Pikhurov on drums and bassist Vadim Lalayan. Bringing those storied lyrics to life, and with great certainty, is Alexander Chumakov.

Combined, these five talents lay down some unique Rock-hard stylistic creations that are of a rare breed not often heard in the constraints of Heavy Metal. Estate means business and their debut 'Fantasia' does the business of music in no uncertain terms, breathing fresh air and giving us a peek in to the musical soul of their homeland!

Bruce E.J. Atkinson

EUPHORIA AUDIO – 'EUPHORIA AUDIO' *(Ninelives)* MODERN/ALTERNATIVE

Wakefield's Euphoria Audio may just have released the best debut album of 2014. Blessed with the ability to pen classy Melodic Pop Rock songs and a lead vocalist (Matt Shirty) with adept delivery, EA has already showcased their gifts supporting Aerosmith in Singapore and playing MusExpo in L.A. several times as well as playing at the Viper rooms. Heavily supported by Jeff Blue and Brandon Friesen, who produced the debut EP as well as this album for the band, EA seems to be associating themselves with all the right people.

Ready made for the U.S. market – although amazingly the record was recorded in Bradford – songs such as the hugely melodic 'Your Tomorrow's' , the Indie Rock of 'Collide' and 'Time' have echoes of U2, whilst Shirty's exquisite vocals on the slick Pop of '3 Seconds' or 'Speechless' bring to mind prime-time Nine Days or the now defunct Canadian band Outmatch.

It's a perception, perhaps correctly, that this genre of classy Pop Rock is the preserve of America or Canada, but Euphoria Audio buck the trend and then some with an album that is as good, if not better, than their transatlantic counterparts.

Mike Newdeck

FIREWÖLFE – 'WE RULE THE NIGHT' *(Limb)* HARD ROCK

When it comes to retro, many bands these days opt either for the seventies style Classic Rock sound or a more commercial Journey-ish eighties AOR delivery, so it's nice to hear a band that have re-visited the L.A. Sunset Strip sound of the mid-eighties – not the Glam/Hair Metal of Mötley Crüe, but the traditional Hard Rock/Metal that conjures up images of classic bands like Dokken, Rough Cutt, Icon and Ratt, while also tapping into other various influences along the way.

To create this sound and ensure its authenticity, FireWölfe founding member Nick Layton (guitar/keyboards) has enlisted a cast of members with numerous pedigrees who cut their teeth during the scene; David Fefolt (Angels Of Baylon, Masi, David Ellefson) on vocals, Bobby Ferkovich (Presto Ballet, Powertrain) on bass and Jay Schellen (Hurricane, Unruly Child, Badfinger, Asia) on drums. Together they have created a faithful representation of what was so enjoyable about the L.A. scene back in its heyday on 'We Rule The Night', the follow-up to 2011's self-titled debut.

Opener 'We Rule The Night', 'Ready To Roll' and 'Dream Child' tread the fine line between Hard Rock and all-out Heavy Metal perfectly, the title track itself bearing more than a passing resemblance to classic Dio. The dramatic 'The Devil's Music' is a slower and more theatrical track with elements of early Savatage, the use of violin on the softer musical passages adding to the eeriness of the song, while the age-old lyrical subject of the misunderstanding of Heavy Metal gets a huge thumbs-up from me.

To select other highlights, 'A Senator's Gun' is a mid-paced, moody cut with an interesting lyrical concept and 'Who's Gonna Love You?' is a riff-heavy Bluesy excursion with more than a hint of Whitesnake. But it's the pairing of 'Late Last Night' and 'Long Road Home' that demonstrate the more melodious side of FireWölfe, effortlessly blending big choruses with a Hard Rock delivery.

Classy in delivery with some highly impressive performances, 'We Rule The Night' is well worth investigating.

Ant Heeks

JORN LANDE & TROND HOLTER – 'DRACULA: SWING OF DEATH' (Frontiers) HARD ROCK

To put it simply, the story of Dracula is one of the greatest examples of Gothic Romanticism the literary world has ever produced; the profound effect of the unsurpassable Bram Stoker original still shining through in countless scribblings more than a century later.

A heightened tale of terror and melodrama set against the backdrop of an all-consuming love story, the musical (read Rock Opera) possibilities of Dracula have always seemed pretty obvious… quite why it's taken this long for anyone to interpret the tome in that way is somewhat perplexing to say the least.

The name of Jorn Lande should need no introduction for anyone but for those with little more than a passing interest in the genre, his work with Masterplan, Ark, The Snakes etc. (not to mention his parallel solo career) will no doubt take up more than its fair share of shelf space in the greater proportion of readers album collections. Teaming up with renowned guitarist Trond Holter (perhaps better known as Teeny from Wig Wam... unless of course you were a fan of the criminally underrated Dream Police?), with 'Swing Of Death' Lande has crafted a deliciously twisted, oft macabre, musical interpretation of the greatest horror story ever told.

I'm told that plans are already well advanced to take this to the theatres (in Norway at least) later this year, and given the right backing and production, I'm sure it could go much further afield… hell, 'Phantom Of The Opera' and 'The Rocky Horror Show' still play to packed houses around the globe so the possibilities are endless!

Pitched somewhere between Queen and Jim Steinman with the added dynamics of Alice Cooper and more than a nod to the brooding Hard Rock sound of Lande's best solo works, '...Death' isn't like your average Rock Opera – there are no long musical interludes for starters – yet the story ebbs and flows perfectly over a batch of fully integrated musical sojourns (or songs to me and you!).

The booming baritone of Lande himself picks up the lion's share of the spoils as you'd expect, although the rather striking Norwegian chanteuse Lena Fløitmoen Børresen certainly gives as good as she gets on the likes of 'Under The Gun', 'River Of Tears' and 'Into The Dark'. Atmospheric, impassioned and imbued with the kind of swagger many feel has been missing from Lande's solo stuff of late, 'Swing Of Death' is a dazzling piece of musical theatre befitting the literary masterpiece upon which it is based… well worth the entry price!

Dave Cockett

FROM THE FIRE – 'EVIL MEN DO' (Independent) MELODIC ROCK

It's almost twelve months since From The Fire were announced for October's 'Firefest – The Final Fling'. It was indubitably a major coup for Kieran Dargan and his team; those who remembered them and their self-titled debut in 1991 immediately began to salivate at the prospect of finally seeing them live. But those, like me, who were unfamiliar with the band paid a hasty visit to Amazon to grab a copy of the album before the impending furore sent the prices rocketing through the roof. I bought it within minutes (it still wasn't cheap), and when I eventually heard it, I was enthralled by its classy vibe, lush keyboard overlays and strength of songs. On the back of their invitation, original members J.D. Kelly (vocals, keyboards), Tommy Lafferty (guitars, vocals) and Michael Sciotto (drums, vocals) were joined by bassist Nicky Moroch and straight away began work on material which has now transpired into this long-awaited sophomore album. The question everybody will no doubt be asking is "is it as good as the debut"? Well...

Unlike the debut, 'Evil Men Do' didn't instantaneously hit the spot for me. It certainly lacks the polish of its predecessor, which may well be attributed to the absence of production guru Jean Beauvoir. However, after several spins the album begins to show its mature quality. There are a couple of issues but they are totally subjective, and you may/may not agree. The first three songs: 'In Your Dreams', 'Leave Me Alone' and 'Liar' are standard, up-tempo AOR offerings, with soaring musicianship, catchy choruses, great melodies and Kelly in fine vocal form; it's no surprise that the band dedicated the album to the imperial Jimi Jamison (RIP), as you can clearly imagine the great man singing these songs.

The remainder of the album is rather pedestrian in comparison, due to four of the final seven songs being ballads – just a simple alteration of sequencing (or self shuffling) would, I feel, improve the dynamics of the entire opus. Having said that, these ballads are top class – 'Into Your Heart' is a sublime, bittersweet story of lost love, whilst the epic title track could easily be a soundtrack to a Hollywood Western with its brooding, grandiose tone, which builds and evolves until Lafferty unleashes a spine-tingling solo; 'Blame It On The Moon' is another heartstring-puller. The final song, 'Forever And A Day' is a strange choice; a lightweight Countrified ditty that closes the album with little more than a murmur.

Don't expect the debut Mk2, but it is a grower – however, at forty-two minutes in length, I feel slightly short-changed. A solid effort though.

Dave Crompton

GEOFF CARNE – 'ONE TO ONE' (Advision UK) BLUES/SOUL

So here's the thing, the blurb that came with Geoff Carne's album 'One To One' has this line in it: "the album is aimed at attracting more women to the music in a male dominated genre... have been specially crafted to appeal to the ladies". Now I'm not known for my rampant feminism, I'm just a tomboy into Rock and Blues, but excuse me, is this a bit patronizing or what? Wondering if I was being "overly sensitive", I ran the statement by a few male friends; their response was a unanimous..."is he mad!" So first, a note to his PR people, you might want to rethink your marketing strategy as you seem to have successfully pee'd off the market you were trying to tap into.

However not one to bear a grudge I give this a listen, attempting to be as open-minded as possible under the circumstances. Carne cites his influences as Whitesnake and Bad Company and if you listen close enough you can hear this. This is Blues in its mildest form at the point it crosses over to AOR. Opener 'Back On The Road Again' is a nice strummy Blues number to ease you in. The songs are well constructed, albeit a little predictable, and Carne's voice, although not distinctive, is mellow and suits the songs well. Oddly one of the "songs for the ladies" is one of the heaviest, that's 'Baby Blues (All Roads Lead To You)'.

All in all this album isn't bad (my biggest criticism would be the lyrics, they are a bit predictable) but personally I like my Blues a bit more down and dirty, but if you like yours "lite" then this would be a great addition to your collection.

Helen Bradley Owers

GOOBER GUN – 'GOOBER GUN' (Dyhard) MODERN/ALTERNATIVE

Well, I'll be a bandwagon-jumping son of a gun, if they ain't read the music mags and written some songs to fit in...

Goober Gun (Erm...) are a British band who hanker after the warm bosom of the chart fraternity; why else would you have the aimless, huge choruses, the anguished vocals and scattergun rhythms of Wild Beasts or TV On The Radio, but without the inspiration in the latter case. Admittedly, the two starters are a little quality, 'Burn It Down' may have the Indie Rock hammer and whoops we know so well, but is leavened by a floaty alto-sax whilst 'Giving Hope', a charity single, is assured enough to keep the interest through a Snow Patrol centre for an extraordinary moment; a short, sharp rap.

But thereafter, this doesn't seem like Rock, Dance yes (the boy-band goes Rock feel of 'Rock N Bangkok', cheesy chorus in place), Pop Punk ('Stereo' has it all in place) and pure Indie ('Reasons'; scudding guitar, gentle vocals, all encompassing chorus, you know the stuff).

There is some really interesting and fairly exciting stuff here. Perhaps Goober Gun will chase that sound and produce something extraordinary; they have it in them but first they have to throw away that blueprint and really take a chance. It's cold out there, but the results can be as hot as your favourite curry.

Steve Swift

HARMONY – 'THEATRE OF REDEMPTION' (Ulterium) PROGRESSIVE

When I read that Sweden's Harmony had a new album out I was very pleased, pleased because I had really enjoyed their first two albums of highly Melodic Progressive Metal and in their (at the time) lead singer Henrik Bath (Darkwater), I had always felt that they had a star. So when I read that Bath had departed the band, I became worried as to the chances of Harmony actually being able to replace such a strong lead vocalist. However once I got to hear the new album 'Theatre Of Redemption', with the band's new front-man Daniel Heiman (Heed, Lost Horizon), all of my worries happily vanished. This was mainly due to the fact that Heiman has slotted into his role with ease and the band have again come up with another classy, hard hitting and complex set of songs that any aficionado of Prog Metal could want or ask for.

Also evident as you listen to this new release is that the youthful exuberance of the earlier albums has been replaced by a more mature and experienced musical style, which translates itself wonderfully into the songs that make up '...Redemption'. I'd urge you to watch out for the beautifully paced and performed 'Inhale' where Heiman makes his huge vocal presence felt (which only makes the rest of the band play even better to try to catch him up) and the Eastern flavoured 'Son Of The Morning' where the guitars and keyboards of Markus Sigfridsson and John Svensson join once again with the soaring voice of Heiman to help create an overblown epic Progressive Metal track, with twisting rhythmic patterns that keep you engaged as the song plays. Then try 'What If' which is less Progressive and more Hard Rock in style than the other songs found on the album; it's still Harmony but Harmony trying a slightly different musical tack. Then you have the stunning ballad 'You Are', a piano lament (accompanied by Heiman's plaintive vocal) ushers in the song, then the other band members join in and this wonderful piece about love and loss, begins to weave its musical spell over you. Finally sit back and enjoy title track 'Theatre Of Redemption' which is another sweeping epic, one that has slow burning verses that build and build until they crash upon the shores of the more up-tempo choruses, choruses which then very effectively worm their way in to your subconscious; all the while Sigfridsson solos and riffs like a man possessed.

It has been way, way too long since Harmony made music together and I just hope that on the strength of 'Theatre Of Redemption' we don't have to wait four years and more for another one.

Ian Johnson

HAYSEED DIXIE – 'HAIR DOWN TO MY GRASS' (Independent) SOUTHERN/COUNTRY/FOLK

Like Steel Panther, Hayseed Dixie are one of those bands that divide opinions. They started out as an AC/DC Hillbilly Tribute band, but have more recently left the AC/DC songs behind to cover a wider range of artists, and even write the occasional original composition. Whether you agree or not with what they do (basically taking a Rock song and performing it in their own inimitable Bluegrass style), you can't deny that they're actually very good at what they do, and they've forged a fairly successful career out of doing it – though it may be a bone of contention for some that they've made it bigger than some of the amazing acts that write their own songs.

So on this album HD put their own spin on a set of Classic Rock songs; namely 'Don't Stop Believin'', 'Eye Of The Tiger', 'The Final Countdown', 'We're Not Gonna Take It', 'Summer Of 69', 'Pour Some Sugar On Me', 'Dude (Looks Like A Lady)', 'Living On A Prayer', 'Wind der Veranderung', 'We Are The Road Crew', 'Comfortably Numb' and 'Don't Fear The Reaper' – if you need me to name the artists then you're without doubt reading the wrong magazine (and the German one you don't think you know, you do – it's actually the German version of a very successful song from 1991!)

For some it might be sacrilegious to take some of the most beloved songs of our Rock genre and perform them in this style, but I can't deny some of them put a smile on my face [and mine – Ed]. How long the novelty appeal can last for though remains to be seen.

Ant Heeks

HELIOPOLIS – 'CITY OF THE SUN' (10t) PROGRESSIVE

Any band featuring members who can count time in Mars Hollow, Tin Jenn or Rocket Scientists on their CV have to be worth a whirl, don't they? Damn right they do...and Heliopolis, who can lay claim that bold statement, prove it to be true. So often debut albums from line-ups which promise much fall flat but not 'City Of The Sun', for this really is an album pulling not only from the previous experiences of its members, but also from the best of what Prog has offered up since the 1970s.

Everyone from Yes to Spock's Beard, Mars Hollow to IQ, Genesis to Transatlantic is brought into focus, yet even though Michael Matier's guitar tone can lean heavily on Steve Howe for inspiration, the likenesses never seem overpowering. Vocalist Scott Jones somehow sits neatly between the fragility of Jon Anderson and the bullishness of Geddy Lee, his efforts pushing songs which otherwise might appear over-technical into accessible mode; a real coup for a band so willing and capable to take you on the Prog merry go round. 'Take A Moment' combines fragility to strength, a curious early Marillion-like melody climbing onto a Yes vibe to revel in sumptuous musical tradeoffs, drums pounding and popping, as keyboards build and soar across an underpinning of roaming bass.

The short 'Mr. Wishbone' unearths a curious instrumental which in places seems to bark like a dog and in others bloop and bleep like a 1970's experimental Moog presentation. However as riffs clash over its head, a threatening rush suddenly takes over. It's an odd little interlude, but on an album which cleverly remains a short blast of five songs and forty something minutes, it makes for a pleasant stop off point from the more rampant excursions. 'Elegy' adds an almost Kansas lightness to proceedings, while 'Love And Inspiration' calms everything down for this album's classy conclusion.

'City Of The Sun' is a rare thing, capable of twisting the Prog of the 1970s and 1980s into that of the 2000s. That it does so with the caressing conviction revealed here suggests that we may be looking at one of the stalwarts of the scene for the late 2010s.

Steven Reid

HELL IN THE CLUB – 'DEVIL ON MY SHOULDER' *(Scarlet)* HARD ROCK

Hell In The Club is an Italian collection of musicians that includes the vocalist from Elvenking and the bass player from Secret Sphere. The guys have moved distinctly away from the Power Metal genre of the other bands to deliver a dirty sound with strong Sleazy overtones.

'Bare Hands' kicks things off well; it's catchy, pacey and pretty simple. The title track follows, delivering some uplifting choruses and good harmonies from the backing vocals. Style-wise we're very much talking Crazy Lixx blended with some of the thundering rhythm section of Hardcore Superstar, especially evident in the heavier 'Whore Paint'. That doesn't stop the band from splashing out on some keys in 'Beware The Candyman' though, injecting some Quireboys-esque fun into the fray.

The second half of the album is much weaker. The songs lack the same distinction as the earlier tracks with choruses seemingly on a loop, especially towards the end, and the listening experience is clouded with too many layers of sound. In 'Toxic Love' I can see the band tearing up a stage with a furious and energetic performance, but on just hearing the track, the vocals strain for the top notes and both this track and 'Save Me' lose their way a bit.

'Muse' is an enjoyable combination of a more pondering tone paired with thick backing vocals and heavy guitars. This track demonstrates where Hell In The Club find a strong, sustainable style but throughout the album they tend to stray from it.

KING DIAMOND – 'DREAMS OF HORROR' *(Metal Blade)* HEAVY METAL

Since the initial dissolution of Mercyful Fate way back in 1985, glass shattering screamer and gravelly voiced ghoul King Diamond has been a massively influential force in the Metal world; the man with the painted face constantly creating intricate horror/concept albums, the like of which are all the rage now. 'Dreams Of Horror' is the first compilation to bring together selections from each of his twelve solo releases and cover the two record labels he's been involved with. Hence things are neatly split into an eleven track "Roadrunner" disc ('Fatal Portrait' (1986) to 'The Eye'(1990)) and twelve track Metal Blade disc ('The Spider's Lullaby' (1995) to 'Give Me Your Soul…Please'(2007)) which makes for a remarkably engaging chronological overview of Diamond's excellent solo offerings.

While '...Portrait' was billed as the first solo KD album, the very fact that fellow MF members Michael Denner (guitar) and Timi Hansen (bass) also featured, reaffirmed that it was actually the desire of guitarist Hank Shermann to seek pastures new which caused the band to split; Shermann going on to form the Melodic Rock-tastic Fate. However, even though the line-up was completed by guitarist Andy LaRocque and drummer Mikkey Dee (Motorhead) expectations were that 'Fatal…' would simply be an extension of Diamond's previous outfit. Admittedly the 'Fatal…' pair of 'The Candle' and 'Dressed In White' do bear a resemblance, however it was also immediately clear that Diamond was going to follow his own, more sophisticated Metal destiny. Next up was the album 'Abigail', arguably the strongest of all Diamond's offerings; the pair of 'The Family Ghost' and 'Black Horseman' still striking a fantastic balance between theatrical horror story and bristling Metallic riffs.

With Denner and Hansen then departing, Diamond and LaRocque became constants in a revolving door of musicians and yet whether through the 'The Invisible Guest' from 'Them', 'Waiting' from 'The Graveyard', or 'Never Ending Hill' from '…Please', the quality never dips and, in general, the attack stays remarkably unmistakable. Latter contributions such as 'Black Devil' and 'Help!!!', both from 2000's 'House Of God', do hit with a grittier, harder force, yet with LaRocque's superb solos and Diamond's characteristically high pitched wail, there could never be any doubt as to who this was.

One of the key factors behind 'Dreams Of Horror' was the opportunity for both singer and guitarist to improve the sound across all of the tracks included and I have to say they've done a magnificent job, the clarity and power adding a hefty wallop to the remarkable vocals and memory snagging riffs.

Having suffered a heart attack in 2010, it has been too long since the last King Diamond studio offering (seven years), however hopefully a number of recent festival appearances and now this wonderful collection signal an end to that silence. In the meantime revel in this superb album and hail the true King of Horror Metal. Sweet dreams…

Steven Reid

For me, 'Devil…' lacked the diversity of the 2011 album 'Let The Games Begin'. While the debut sounds more amateur in the execution, it was that lack of polish and boyish charm that made the album exciting. Unfortunately 'Devil On My Shoulder' is too much of the same, and, bar one or two tracks, that same is average at its best.

Sophie Brownlee

HIGHWAY DREAM – 'WONDERFUL RACE' *(Street Symphonies)* HARD ROCK

Highway Dream was formed in the famous musical Italian City of Cremona. The four-piece (originally a five-piece) released a debut EP 'Born To Be…' back in 2009 that featured four original songs and a cover of the Scorpions classic 'Rock You Like A Hurricane'; the latter not an unsurprising cover as Isabella "Isa" Gorni is also part of the all-female Scorpions tribute band, Virgin Killers. HD have spent the last five years honing their song-writing skills and playing live shows in Northern Italy and produced a very creditable debut album. This is certainly not your run-of-the-mill Female-Fronted Rock band and is an eclectic mix of Rock tunes with many different influences evident. Lead vocalist Gorni has a deep voice, with only a slight hint of an accent, and comes across like the wonderful Sass Jordan singing Metal.

'Unbelievable' kicks the album off in fine style with Gabriele "Gheghe" Frosi's bass very high in the mix, as it is throughout the whole album; I can hear hints of early Rush in this song.

The album was recorded, mixed and mastered by Oscar Burato at Atomic Stuff Studios in Isorella, Brescia, Italy. The mix is excellent, however the overall production (obviously affected by budget) does somewhat let the album down a bit, especially the horrid drum sound. Drummer's Massimo "Max" Agliardi plays his heart out on the album but it sounds, at times, that he has been locked away in a basement.

'Don't Let You Die' is more Melodic Rock sounding and features the first of many excellent guitar solos courtesy of Gorni's husband, Roberto "Roby" Zoppi. The album contains not one, but two title tracks, the first being 'Highway Dream' with its Mötley Crüe-like rhythm and the second is the album title track 'Wonderful Race' with its L.A. Sleaze vibe. The heaviest track on the album, with its thunderous bass and killer riff, is 'Many Reasons', a song that could easily have been an outtake from Metallica's 'Kill 'Em All' album!

'Let Me Be Your Breath' sees a change of pace and allows Gorni to show off her vocal talents. 'Like An Earthquake' features more heavy bass during the verses but is straight ahead Rock by the time it reaches the chorus. 'Falling Down' is another heavy track with heavy bass and another scorching solo whilst 'Some Stars' is a ballad that reminds me of American all-female band L7. Arguably, the band saved their best song 'til last with a true Sleaze anthem 'Born To Be A Rock Star' that I imagine will go down a storm in the live arena.

Taking aside the production issues, this is a very laudable debut album.

Mark Donnelly

JOHN FAIRHURST – 'SALTWATER' *(Independent)* BLUES/SOUL

In case you were still pretty sceptical about British Blues – or the Blues genre associated exclusively with the very cradle of its birth somewhere down the Mississippi Delta – then 'Saltwater', a debut album of a Bristol-based singer/song-writer John Fairhurst, may convince you about your approach being not entirely right (to put it mildly). Fairhurst learned his chops performing alongside many different artists, from Fun Lovin' Criminals to the late Blues legend Johnny Winter. And, guessing by the Bluesy roots of 'Saltwater', it's the latter's heritage that influenced this British musician the most and, perhaps, encouraged him to take his listeners for a musical journey onto the deep South U.S., right into the heart of the Blues. That's what 'Saltwater' stands for music-wise – a journey right into the heart of America.

'Breakdown' is the first stop in this journey that starts off with a grinding, gritty guitar riff, developing into a rough, Bluesy track with some distant echoes of Boogie, much in vein of the early ZZ Top. In spite of the modern-day production, there's a certain live vibe to this track as well as the rest of the material, starting from the openers groovy follow-up 'Who You Fooling'. 'Pay Day' is slightly more melodic and perhaps even Country-ish, although Fairhurst's low, throaty voice against the background of the raw, metallic sound of slide guitar may remind you of Chris Rea's less "radio friendly" songs. 'More More More' is a lively Americana-infused gallop, followed by the Boogie piano-based 'Time Goes By' and guitar-laden Blues of 'I'm Coming Home'. 'No Shelter' gravitates towards a more contemporary Blues/Southern Rock sound, a territory occupied by the likes of the modern-day Lynyrd Skynyrd, whereas the feisty 'Black Cat', featuring a rich use of harmonica, makes a volte-face turn towards more retro-oriented sound again. 'Dance In The Pines' continues in the similar manner, towards the finish that is a title track – an epic, eight minute piece of Blues Rock entitled unsurprisingly 'Saltwater'.

Perhaps the biggest asset to 'Saltwater' is the convincing live vibe of the album, almost as if Fairhurst was making his recordings somewhere in a low-class joint down the American South, mantled in cigarette smoke and the smell of whiskey. It's an album that is Southern-to-the-utmost and almost literally soaked in the genre of Americana sound-wise, laden with tasteful slide guitar and harmonica, with John Fairhurst delivering his vocals in a Bluesy, expressive manner. 'Saltwater' is thus a real diamond in the rough for those into traditional Blues, Southern Rock and Americana – perhaps with a bit of a modern-day twist here and there – and mostly those who want the music to be genuine and thus raw rather than a well-crafted product.

Alexandra Mrozowska

KAIPA – 'SATTYG' *(InsideOut)* PROGRESSIVE

Originally formed in 1973, Kaipa took a break in 1982 before reforming in 1991 with 'Sattyg' (translated as 'Mischief') being their seventh release since that reformation. Band members have changed over time with only Hans Lundin (keyboards & vocals) being a constant.

To my ears Kaipa are unique as they blend Classic Prog with Swedish Folk, Fusion with little dabbles into Medieval music, to produce a distinctive sound. All of these aspects are evident, thus encapsulating the Kaipa sound in one place, during the opening epic 'A Map Of Your Secret World' which opens like Yes, moves into a Medieval Folk phase then later there are some contemporary sounding guitar solos and others that are not unlike former member Roine Stolt's work. The shared vocals of Patrik Lundström and Aleena Gibson present another facet to their sound.

Consisting of three epic tracks (twelve minutes plus), two of between seven and ten minutes and two relatively short numbers, the predominantly instrumental 'World Of The Void' is one of those of middling length; again it showcases the skills of guitarist Per Nilsson

plus those of keyboardist Lundin to fine effect. Gibson sings this one and it has to be said that, for some, her tone may come across as being rather shrill. Lovers of classic keyboard sounds will relish Lundin's Hammond Organ work though.

The bizarrely titled 'Screwed-upness' is another epic that ebbs and flows between various feels, tempos and styles; not least the sudden alternations between heavy-ish guitar work-outs and genteel Medieval recorder sections (courtesy of guest Frederik Lindqvist). Indeed, there are some pretty heavy passages here so I should add Prog Metal to the genre mix. Drummer Morgan Ågren certainly gets to show his capabilities.

The title track is like a cross between Jethro Tull and Mike Oldfield with recorder in place of the flute. The introduction of guest Elin Rubinsztein's violin takes the track it into different territory again.

The next epic is 'A Sky Full Of Painters' and again it weaves many musical patterns with guitar leading the way much of the time, while the bass of Jonas Reingold is evident, Weather Report came to my mind. The closing guitar solo is rather tasty; meaningful, melodic and not just widdling. 'Unique When We Fall' is a building track with a fine dual vocal arrangement and a nice chunky riff underpinning it.

'Without Time – Beyond Time' closes out the album and features a less strident Gibson on vocals. Once more the track has several facets and puts me in mind of Yes in places, with hints of Spock's Beard and The Flower Kings.

Definitely an album for the diehard Prog fans among our readership.

Gary Marshall

KALEDON – 'ANTILLIUS: THE KING OF THE LIGHT' *(Scarlet)* POWER METAL

'Antillius: The King Of The Light' is Kaledon's new chapter in the ever growing, ever expanding saga of the Kingdom Of Kaledon. Set in year 1376 in and around a huge valley in the Northern England, the story tells tales of a flourishing Kingdom that sees Knights of Kaledon (both good and bad) battling evil Demon Lords, other warring Kings and life itself; there's also a love story and many other elements to discover.

The music itself is a glorious mixture of sounds that bring to mind Rhapsody, Iron Maiden and high-quality Symphonic Metal, with a lot of other things going on that make this a different listening prospect from your average Metal album. There are a lot of acted/sound passages between the songs that drive them along and all help the songs to continue the story line. The trouble for me therefore is to try to pick out just a few songs from an album that is the eighth in an ongoing conceptual series. I'll do my best by choosing some of my personal favourites.

'Friends Will Be Enemies' is a fast straight ahead Symphonic Metal track, one that has everything a fan of this type of music could ask for; crunching, stylish guitar riffs, soaring vocals and a battering ram of a rhythm section that all join together to create a glorious, over the top killer song. 'New Glory For The Kingdom' is another over the top song, a full-on, in the face attack of guitars and vocals with solos going off like explosions every second. I have to point out that Kaledon are not just a one trick (sound) pony however. Proof of this is the beautiful ballad 'Elisabeth' which helps the album to slow its pace and breathe and a track on which vocalist Marco Palazzi shines. Also worth noting is the mid-paced, broodingly brilliant 'My Will' where the whole band showcase their superb musicianship to great effect. Of course there are many others to choose from but discovering them and this whole story is best left to you.

Eight chapters (as the band call the albums) in and Kaledon just get better and better with each release. Despite the fact this is the eighth album in the series, you can dive into it without ever being worried that you'll get lost or not follow what's going on. That's because Kaledon have recorded twelve great songs that keep you absorbed and entertained from beginning to end. 'Antillius: The King Of The Light' is a great place to start out if you want to discover Kaledon's music, it's an equally great starting point if you want to then go back and see what else you've missed.

Ian Johnson

KASIM SULTON – '3' *(Independent)* ROCK

This album has been a long time coming. Kasim Sulton is one of the key band member/sideman/journeyman in the business. The list of people and bands he has played with is staggering – Meatloaf, Todd Rundgren, Utopia, Blue Öyster Cult, Joan Jett, Hall & Oates... the list goes on and on. On top of this constant work, Sulton has an on/off solo career dating back to 1982 – that said, his latest offering '3' is only the third full album he has done. A perfectionist, Sulton has nurtured this baby for ironically around three years and worked on it between tours with Rundgren and BÖC.

Although more famous for playing the bass and performing background vocals, Sulton sang lead for some of the most famous Utopia songs and he is also a multi-instrumentalist. On '3', he does the lion's share of work but also brings in a lot of special guests on what he has declared as his last full "CD" recording. In no particular order these guests include his ex-Utopia bandmates plus Jason Scheff (Chicago), Greg Hawks (The Cars), Buck Dharma (BÖC), Phil Thornalley (The Cure), Jeff Kazee (Southside Johnny And The Asbury Jukes) and Mark Alexander (Little Steven).

The album is mainly self-penned but there are two covers; 'Too Much (On Her Mind)' by Tubes-founder Bill Spooner and the Gershwin Brothers' 'Someone To Watch Over Me' which Sulton sees as reflecting the golden age of song-writing.

As for a stand out track, it's got to be the single 'The Clocks All Stopped' which could have appeared in the 'Adventures In Utopia' album and held its head up high – backed by his Utopia bandmates and of course flashes of Rundgren's lead guitar. The final track 'Fade Away' (which is a new song though sharing the title of a classic Rundgren tune) closes the door on this chapter of Sulton's career reflecting on getting a second chance.

The focus on quality and the contribution from stellar musicians has resulted in a near-perfect album embracing Kasim Sulton's Utopian past but also including his unique Beatles-influenced Soft Rock styling.

Rob McKenzie

KEITH EMERSON & GREG LAKE – 'LIVE FROM MANTICORE HALL' *(Manticore/Cherry Red)* PROGRESSIVE

Together again… Emerson, Lake and... oh. Well, at least we have those two icons of Prog on the same stage, giving us some of the, perhaps, less well known tracks (though of course, fans will have no issue knowing and loving them), often stripped back and very gentle.

There's a bit of chat too, which should be interesting and fun, but actually can come across like Home Counties gents telling tales in the pub over a good game pie and a pint of bitter. It smacks of false modesty and is a little clunky, even though the crowd seem to hang on every self deprecating word. To be balanced though, this does provide good info detailing the background to the songs and has the potential to be very sweet and self deprecating.

But of course these two can really play and the songs are little parcels of delight. So what do we have; 'Bitches Crystal' from 'Tarkus' is less bombastic and more bare bones, gorgeous piano and lovely simplicity. Of course, you can't do that with 'The Barbarian' from the debut and this sounds magisterial whilst 'Take A Pebble', wittily explained beforehand, blasts into action just before a "nice, but where are we going?" button is pressed.

' Pirates' is cheesy and musical theatre but people expect and want that, it does give us all the breathtaking twists and turns we want, almost Reggae, horns and xylophone. Of course, at the centre of this is a seventeen minute performance of 'Tarkus', a more acoustic piece but with all the flair and élan, plus fervent belief that make it a special piece of work.

An interesting piece this and one for collectors to coo over, not to deride collectors, this is a glimpse into the reasons for the songs; those great pieces stripped of frippery and handled with delicacy and care. It's just that sometimes there's a hankering for the songs in their pomp; only so often can you repeat "oh, that's nice". A brilliant band that deserve to be celebrated, just not sure if this party is the best.

Steve Swift

KNIGHT AREA – 'HYPERDRIVE' *(Laser's Edge)* PROGRESSIVE

This is Knight Area's fifth studio album and over the course of those releases I have detected a shift in their sound, moving from the classic Prog style (think Camel, Genesis etc.) and incrementally introducing a harder, heavier and Metal-ish edge. That's not to say that they have eschewed all those classic traits, far from it, but they have introduced additional elements to the palette to great effect.

As if to prove the point, 'Afraid Of The Dark' opens in a manner not unlike Dream Theater with great riffs, fast-finger keyboards, equally rapid guitar shredding (only tuneful) and lovely driving bass lines and drums from Peter Vink and Pieter van Hoorn respectively. When Mark Smit's vocals arrive my mind sways towards Vanden Plas; the chorus is wonderfully memorable, a recurring factor across the entire album where melody is very much to the fore.

'The Lost World' is rather more relaxed and is Pompy in approach, the verse putting me in mind of Kansas while the bridge, chorus and instrumental sections have a Pallas feel to them. 'Bubbles' ebbs and flows (floats?) as well as featuring a trademark keyboard solo flurry by Gerben Klazinga, while guitarist Mark Bogert delivers one of many delicious solos on the sweeping, mid-paced 'This Day'. While all the players are excellent both Bogert and Klazinga are exceptional throughout the album.

'Crimson Skies' gets back to that Prog Metal vibe in a Threshold style on the verses and a chorus that has a Balance Of Power feel. Instrumentally this album is pretty stunning with plenty of terrific soloing which fortunately always stays the right side of both tuneful and relevant rather than gratuitous and deadly boring. 'Avenue Of Broken Dreams' features another fine riff and more splendid keyboards. 'Living In Confusion' starts deceptively quietly before it bursts into life, again reminding me of Pallas.

Arjen Anthony Lucassen guests on the instrumental 'Stepping Out' and his flowing performance is a delight to behold, as with any good instrumental the guitar (in this case) takes on the role of the vocals and creates the track's momentum and lyrical flow.

The guitar and piano interplay on 'Running Away' is splendid while 'Songs From The Past' is the album's ballad which relies primarily on piano and voice; it seems strategically placed as the calm before the storm that is 'Hypnotized', the big finish in more ways than one; it's the longest track and the most ambitious. The lengthy, pacey opening instrumental section is fabulous and the mix of the up-tempo and slow mid-section is inspired.

Yet another quality release in 2014 that is deserving of consideration in any end of year poll.

Gary Marshall

KISSIN' BLACK – 'HEART OVER HEAD' *(Motor)* SOUTHERN/COUNTRY/FOLK

In my time at Fireworks I've come across many genre hybrids, but this is my first dalliance with Goth Country Rock. Swiss quartet Kissin' Black's debut album is predominantly acoustic-based (though not ballads) Country style music, while the Goth influence comes from the frequently dark, twisted lyrical content and singer Guiseppe Mastrogiacomo's voice having a certain likeness to HIM's Ville Valo and Type O Negative's Peter Steele. There is also, a slightly pretentious Art Rock character that occasionally bubbles to the surface throughout the album, in the song titles and the two spoken word intros scattered throughout; highly unusual, but not un-listenable.

'Blues: Unpardonable' gets things off to a fairly lively start – though just acoustic guitar it still Rocks hard. The more commercial likes of 'Borderline', 'Marrakech' and 'How It Ends' demonstrate KB's ability to meld dark lyrical content with uplifting melodies. 'Sex Is A Drug' introduces a more Rockabilly feel, while 'Ella-Marline', 'Can't Stand It Anymore', 'Heart Over Head' and 'Goth: Has No Name' show more of the atmospheric side to their sound. 'More Than Life' is the album's solitary sparse, dark ballad and highly enjoyable is their lengthy take on the W.A.S.P. classic 'Wild Child', wisely the first single and video to be lifted from the release.

Definitely something you're unlikely to have heard before, with such an unusual style it's difficult to see exactly where Kissin' Black's predominant target audience lies; I myself have very broad musical tastes, but I can't see your average Keith Urban fan getting too worked up about this, whereas a HIM fan may question the Country-ish nature of the music. However, the W.A.S.P. cover hints at a willingness to be adopted by the Metal fraternity. Fact is, though lyrically dark and occasionally morose, it has much in the way of melody and optimism, so though I'd definitely recommend you try before you buy, try it you certainly should.

Ant Heeks

LAWLESS – 'R.I.S.E' *(Escape)* HARD ROCK

'Rock Savage', the first album by British Melodic Metal band Lawless, was highly praised across the board and proved that Britain could hold its own against its European and U.S. cousins. Now the band of Demon band-mates Paul Hume (guitar, vocals), Neil Ogden (drums), Persian Risk guitarist Howie G and Headrush bassist Josh 'Tabbie' Williams have returned with second offering 'R.I.S.E'. and as good as '...Savage' was, 'R.I.S.E' is even better. The hooks are catchier, the guitars louder, the vocals stronger and the production bigger, which all combines to make an album that anyone who dares to call him or herself a fan of Rock Music will want to hear.

'1914 (Ghosts Of No Man's Land)' opens the album with a solemn voice telling us of the terrible death toll of WW1 accompanied by bagpipes and machine gun fire, the band then power in telling a story of war heroes and the tragedy and futility of war (fantastic song). After this poignant start the band hit us head-on with the aggressive 'Pain' which is all riffs and attitude, then title track 'Rise' is with us, a heavy riff and vocal vie for supremacy yet at its heart this song is all about the melodic chorus that the song is built around. 'Kiss My Glass' follows and it's a Blues romp with a silly lyric but it works, 'Dead Man Walking', Heaven's Raining', 'How Long', the superb 'Diamond In The Rough' and 'In The End Of The World' continue this very enjoyable Melodic Rock workout that Lawless are putting us through, with great end results.

However the song I'd really like to tell you about isn't one of the band's heavier ones, instead I think their ballad 'Song For A Friend' (with its heartfelt lyrics that will mean a lot to those of you who take the time to listen and read them) is probably the best thing the band have recorded.

With 'R.I.S.E', Lawless have shown that '...Savage' wasn't just a one off and that as a band they have a lot to offer the Rock world. British Melodic Rock seems to be having a renaissance at the moment and Lawless, along with In Faith, Angels Or Kings etc, can take their place in the NNWOBHMRM (New, New Wave Of British Hard/Melodic/Rock/Metal).

Ian Johnson

LEVEL 10 – 'CHAPTER ONE' *(Frontiers)* HEAVY METAL

Level 10 came together because of on-the-road meetings between Mat Sinner (bass) and Russell Allen (vocals) whilst touring with their respective bands. During those boring hours you get in between gigs, the two had many conversations that ended up with the two men swearing that someday they would work together on an album – the result being 'Chapter One'. The band and album is rounded out by Sinner's Primal Fear band-mates Randy Black and Alex Beyrodt on drums and guitars respectively, Roland Grapow on guitars and the ever busy Alessandro Del Vecchio on keyboards. Plus, as a bonus, there are also guest appearances from Magnus Karlsson, Carsten Schulz, Sander Gommans and Amanda Somerville.

To the music then and imagine if you will a "less Metal" Primal Fear joined with a "less Metal" Symphony X, plus a lot of Hard Rock influences thrown in for good measure and you won't be very far off the mark as to what's on offer. 'Cry No More' is the perfect song to open, with its melodic structure, great chorus and exceptional performances; you know you can sit back relax and just wait for L10 to entertain you, which they do with consummate ease.

'Soul Of A Warrior' has a superb vocal effort from Allen and the heavy riffing guitars of Beyrodt and Grapow to complement his work, though the real star of the song is the wonderful Hammond Organ supplied by Del Vecchio which builds and soars throughout the song; again there's another captivating chorus to contend with. You will also find the likes of the hard hitting 'No Turning Back', 'One Way Street' (a Bluesy workout with a slow, almost retro feel and that inevitable stunning Allen vocal), 'Blasphemy' and 'Demonized' (where L10 doing their best SyX impressions). That's not to forget 'Last Man On Earth' which has a wicked hook and some stunning guitar interplay and the ballad 'All Hope Is Gone' (which is just spectacular) where you'll find Allen doing what he and only a handful of other vocalists can do, which is going from all out balls to the wall high intensity to heartfelt emotion filled vocals at the click of his fingers. Both are songs you should check out with haste.

Of course due to space I cannot tell you about all the other wonderful music that can be found on this album, so another visit to your favourite retailer looks in order, where once again you can invest in another fantastic Rock release.

Level 10 = great singer, great musicians and above all else great songs... not much more you could ask for really is there? Of course there is, where's Chapter 2?

Ian Johnson

MY OWN GHOST – 'LOVE KILLS' *(Secret Entertainment)* MODERN/ALTERNATIVE

'Love Kills' is the debut from Luxembourg-based five-piece My Own Ghost and it is safe to say it has pretty much slapped me silly. In terms of a comparison MOG brings to my mind a cross between The Birthday Massacre, Evanescence and Delain (at their least "Symphonic"); the fact I reference the latter should give some indication of just how good I think this is.

'...Kills' explodes out the blocks with 'Crimson Ground' which is fuelled by a high-tempo rhythm and guitar that sprints into a rather groovy chorus; it one that makes you sit up and pay attention. There is a Funky, bass filled verse to 'Bad Love' with Julie Rodesch's relaxed vocals sitting atop before the chorus kicks in with some driven guitar that takes things up a gear. The intro and verses of 'Beautiful Mistake' features pace-filled Techno samples and beats, pulsing synth and some fine vocals from Rodesch before the whole thing Rocks out when the guitar ups the ante for an upbeat and memorable chorus. Another up-tempo offering (also with some added electronic inclusions) is 'Broken Mirror' with its quick-step beat, churning guitar and a chorus where Rodesch adds some fine wailed vocals.

As good as these tracks are there are four that have been on constant repeat for me. 'Crystal Ball' opens with some strummed guitar, then the punchy beat and riff fire up and the song just erupts; the catchy chorus is one that is impossible to remove from my mind. There is a mellow verse to 'Free Fall' then the chugging guitar rumbles into ear shot and the whole song takes off to another memorable choral line from Rodesch. MOG show they know how to slow things down as well with the ballad-like 'Pathways'; it has a slower, bouncing beat, simple keys and a rather touching chorus. But my favourite of all has to be the captivating 'Silence' with its highly emotional lyrics, passionate vocal performance and a cracking bridge and guitar solo; it hit the spot right from the off.

In truth, there isn't a poor track amongst the thirteen on offer and had 'Love Kills' come out earlier in the year, it would have had the potential to be right in the mix for my 2014 Album Of The Year... yes it's that good! Despite the late arrival, My Own Ghost's debut (I still can't believe this is a debut) has still managed to force its way into my year's Top 5. If you are a fan of Female-Fronted, Modern/Alternative Rock bands, this is one album that I think could resonate equally well for you and maybe any other readers who adore the more contemporary styles.

Dave Scott

LIGHT YOU UP – 'ALL WE'VE EVER KNOWN' *(Reclaim)* MODERN/ALTERNATIVE

This debut album from Birmingham Pop Punk outfit is something of a cracker. Usually the preserve of America, Light You Up treads a well-worn path of catchy Pop Punk in the vein of All Time Low, Mayday Parade et al. Produced in San Francisco by Sam Pura, who also produced fellow Pop Punksters The Story So Far, you kind of know where this album is heading.

It's enjoyable fare though, characterised by high quality Pop Punk standards such as 'It's About Time', 'Haven't You Heard' or the harmony-induced 'Foxfire'. On occasions, as has been the trend with band's such as Lower Than Atlantis on their recent album, vocalist Tom Napier's English accent comes through like a beacon. It's almost as if the band is saying "listen to us, we can do Pop Punk too, and we're from England".

The fact that they can back it up with some excellent tune-smithery that America's elite would struggle to compete with means that beating the drum for their home country is totally justified.

Mike Newdeck

LITTLE FISH – 'THE GORDIAN KNOT' *(Independent)* MODERN/ALTERNATIVE

Danish trio Little Fish have endured a lot since they formed in 1994, not least the fact that it has taken twenty years to release their first album. Henrik Berger (vocals/guitar), Dennis Andresen (bass) and Fridi Oster (drums) all began playing their respective instruments at an early age and have played live regularly since they first came together. If I'm honest, I was expecting very little from 'The Gordian Knot' so imagine my surprise after just one play.

'Your Embrace' is an up-tempo opener, punchy in-your-face riffs and brash vocals are the order of your day, but the biggest draw is the impact of the melodies. They are instant and infectious and if you have a taste for modern Pop/Rock then there are eleven songs here that will appeal big time. Fans of Foo Fighters or possibly Seether will find much here to like and though the band are European, the attitude is distinctly American.

The material is energetic with a hint of melancholy, the perfect medium for some thoughtful and ultimately uplifting lyrics. The mix captures a great live sound and everything is really well balanced, highlighting some quality musicianship. 'The Wake Up Call' does exactly that whilst 'Real' is a ballad of sorts featuring subtleties in abundance. Though the pace is tempered slightly, the energy levels remain and keyboards are brought in to underpin the stirring power chords. The attitude relents towards the close of the album but the quality of the material remains unquestionable. It is hard to believe that the forty-one minute running time has gone so quickly and repeat play is something of a no brainer. The album's mastering was done by Emily Lazar, who has recently worked with the Foos and also Depeche Mode and David Bowie in the past, so clearly she saw there was enough here to warrant involvement.

One can only admire what has been achieved here on what I'm guessing is a limited budget and I can only hope it is not another twenty years before we here from Little Fish again. In fact, I think I will leave the last word to Berger… "it would be great to tour the world and sell a million records but let's start with trying to raise enough money to do a sequel".

Dave Bott

LIVE – 'THE TURN' *(Think Loud)* MODERN/ALTERNATIVE

The comeback of American Alt-Rock legends Live sees them return without iconic front-man Ed Kowalcyzk. This fact alone could divide opinion on the new album 'The Turn' if you're full-on Team Kowalcyzk and refuse to think of the band being any good without his involvement. I have to admit I'm a big fan of Kowalcyzk and I've enjoyed his solo releases since Live's hiatus, but as a consistent fan of the bands output since their breakthrough album 'Throwing Copper', I was hopeful the new Live line-up could still excite me.

The remaining trio of original band members drafted in Chris Shinn of Unified Theory to take on the role of front-man and given the popularity of the man he's replacing, it's an unenviable position of elevated expectation. For me it will always be about the music and the songs; if the band sucks without Kowalcyzk or Rock nicely with Shinn then so be it... let the music do the talking!

You can tell this is a Live album; a lot of those markers of familiarity are there but it is a very different album to what has gone before. Obviously the most different aspect is Shinn's vocals that have a smoother style and he never tries to mimic Kowalcyzk, so it makes it really feel like something different even though some of those obvious Live touches remain present. In a bizarre way the band pushes their sound forward by drawing a lot of influence from their early work with 'Mental Jewellery' and '...Copper'. Not all the songs have an obvious Live touch but on those that do, I find the influence to be linked to either of those two early albums which should intrigue fans who haven't enjoyed their latter day releases.

I would say '...Turn' is one of the most commercial and easily accessible albums the band have ever produced. I personally believe this release stands well amongst their back catalogue and I thoroughly enjoyed it, especially the more "radio friendly" tracks which just get under your skin. 'Don't Run To Wait' is a hook-laced track with a smooth and infectious chorus and along with driven commercial Rocker 'We Open The Door' (which has a chorus that gets stuck in your head) are extremely pleasurably and both are obvious highlights. It is an overall consistently strong album and in my opinion should leave established fans very

happy as they do stay true to their sound whilst moving onto their next chapter.

I have to say I was really pleased with 'The Turn' and it has become a welcome addition to my Live collection and I look forward to this new era for the band.

Paul Woodward

LYNN ALLEN – 'RETRO MANIACS 1982 – 1988' *(AOR Blvd)* AOR

A Melodic Rock band with over thirty years and several albums under their belts, Iowa's Lynn Allen have a cult following among AOR aficionados and a determined leader in singer/guitarist Bill Pieffer who's kept the band going through thick and thin. It's been over five years since their last album so this compilation of their original 1982 debut EP and demos from their early years will be greatly welcomed by fans. Having changed musically over the years, their 1980's pomp was comparable to bands like Tradia and Sugarcreek, so these well-recorded songs are a valuable addition to the LA discography, particularly the long out-of-print EP, but several others on this ten song release are worthy of your attention too.

It doesn't actually state if the tracks are in chronological order so I'm guessing that they are, kicking off with the simple, punchy Pop Rocker 'Tell Me' with its great vocals and melodic keyboard solo, and in general the songs get more Pompy as the release goes on. Long time fans will be familiar with the solid Rocker 'Leave Me Alone' as it was re-recorded for their 1984 debut album 'We Laugh At You', whilst 'Bad Reputation' has a catchy chorus and the laid-back 'No Good To Me' is a nice change of pace.

I could generally do without their admittedly decent version of the early Hall & Oates hit 'Rich Girl' and the Rocker 'Can't Stay Away' outstays its welcome, but the other four songs are all good quality Pomp/AOR with big hooks and great playing. 'It's You' is probably the pick of the bunch with glorious keyboard fills from Ron Froese and traded vocal lines between (I assume) he and Pieffer, but the very Sugarcreek-like 'Reputation', the instantly memorable 'I See The Look In Your Eyes' and the Poppy 'Solo' are not far behind.

For a collection of demos this is a pretty good sounding release so I can't understand why Pieffer was originally reticent to let them be released. Now that they're out and limited to just five hundred copies, I can only suggest that if you're a fan of the band, you really should own one.

Phil Ashcroft

MAGGIE'S MADNESS – 'WAKING UP THE DEAD' *(Starlight)* MELODIC ROCK

'Waking Up The Dead' is a monster nineteen track double album from Germany's Maggie's Madness. Some of you may remember these guys from their eighties output, but this ambitious double album is their comeback record. These songs could have stepped straight out of the eighties so any established fans will be ecstatic at them coming back to where they started off. I wouldn't be surprised if a number of these tracks have roots and foundations in song-writing sessions going back years.

MM have a very strong typical eighties German Melodic Metal sound, the comparisons to Bonfire, Mad Max and eighties-era Scorpions are obvious. With 'Waking...' they may not be re-inventing the wheel, but they are very good at what they do and they have collected together an enjoyable bunch of retro Metal goodness. Like the majority of long albums of this type, it may have a greater impact with a shorter running time and I think with six or seven tracks cut from this release and it would have had more instant appeal to listeners.

Like most bands of this ilk from back in the day, the album has plenty of huge Stadium Rock choruses coupled with driven crunching Metallic guitar riffs. It may not be the greatest album in the world but it is an enjoyable listen and you won't need a time machine if you own this album as it'll take you right back to a time when bands like this ruled the airwaves.

Tracks to pay extra attention to include 'Let's Rock Tonight' with its Stadium Rock chorus, ballsy driven Rocker 'Thunder In My Heart', memorable ballad 'I Won't Back Down' and 'You Make Me Burn So Hot' has an amazing background guitar lick/hook which makes it essential listening! 'An Ugly Fact' has an infectious Metallic guitar riff which makes the song one of the album highlights for me along with the full on Melodic Rocker 'The Games We Are Playing' which has a great chorus.

'Waking Up The Dead' is worth checking out if you still love listening to eighties fuelled Melodic Metal or indeed any similar German bands from those times. The band's performances do show a lot of passion and pride in their music and at times these songs do feel like an ode or love letter to a style of music from our past.

There has been a lot of love put into these compositions and whilst originality is not something these guys will ever be accused of, there is no denying the joy displayed in the crafting of this album. Just turn back the clock before pressing play on this one and you'll end up with a smile on your face.

Paul Woodward

NUBIAN ROSE – 'MENTAL REVOLUTION' *(Limewire/Cargo)* HARD ROCK

Another Fireworks edition and yet another stunning album from a Swedish band for me to review. I have to admit that I was rather surprised that my Editor allowed this out of his grip such is his penchant for Female-Fronted Rock [so many albums...so little time – Ed). 'Mental Revolution' is Nubian Rose's sophomore album following the release of their successful, self-financed debut 'Mountain' back in 2012. On '...Revolution' the band has just made everything bigger, louder, heavier and, in every way, better than the debut.

The album kicks off with 'War', an all-out Metal assault, followed by the six-minute epic 'Time Again', a song where the listener first gets to appreciate the amazing production quality, courtesy of guitarist/co-song-writer Christer Åkerlund who is surely going to be in great demand once this album is heard. The fantastic mix is courtesy of Tobias Lindell who has produced albums for fellow Swedish groups such as Europe, Hardcore Superstar and H.e.a.t. The phenomenal drum sound of Thomas Weijnesjö perfectly complements the fine guitar tones of Åkerlund with the focus of the album being naturally around the awesome, vocal talents of Sofia Lilja Åkerlund; however, Åkerlund never plays second fiddle to his wife. All of this would count for nothing if there weren't any decent songs and on '...Revolution' there are ten pearls.

'Illuminated Within' exhibits the controlled power in Lilja Åkerlund's vocals and is one of several songs that has Mats Levén (Candlemass, Krux, Therion) contributing backing vocals. Similar to the opener, 'The Eye' sounds like a female version of the mighty Ronnie James Dio.

'Tough Guys Don't Dance' gives a cheeky nod to the L.A. Rock scene whilst 'Break Out', the first song to be released from the album, simply pins you up to the wall and rips out your throat!

The second half of the album reverts from Melodic Metal to more traditional Melodic Hard Rock consistency but the quality does not dip and, if anything, improves further; starting with the fantastic AOR-tinged 'Higher', a truly awesome song. The "radio friendly" 'You Will Never Walk Alone' could and should be a monster hit and features keyboards courtesy of guest musician Joakim Ahlund (Caesars, Teddybears). '(Taking This) Further' is another song that could easily be released as a single and oozes class. The album concludes with the sing-a-long 'All Of Your Love' that features the Katarina Kammarkör Choir.

Often when reviewing albums, we reviewers have a tendency to often say that the band show real promise but, rarely is it delivered with such aplomb as Nubian Rose have accomplished with 'Mental Revolution'. I personally think that this album rates alongside Within Temptation's 'The Unforgiving' as the best mainstream, Female-Fronted album of recent years.

Mark Donnelly

MANNING – 'AKOUSTIK #2' *(Festival)* PROGRESSIVE

Better known for his involvement with Manning (the band), Guy Manning (the musician) has put the band on ice with the intention of what U2 once called "dreaming it all up again". 'Akoustik #2' continues the acoustic theme of 2012's 'Akoustik' by taking songs from the Manning catalogue and re-arranging (or as people like to call it, re-imagining) for the Akoustik mood. Composed, arranged and produced by Manning himself, there's the bonus that added to the nine re-workings are three new songs which slot in pretty seamlessly – for anyone who doesn't know the Manning catalogue you probably wouldn't spot the join.

After the minor alarm of the opening few seconds where the keyboard has that working men's club feel about it, there's the relief when 'White Waters' settles into an altogether more gentle and laid back feel which is quite calming and soothing. In fact, "relaxing" sums up the album pretty well. It has a plainly English feel, not quite reaching back as far as the Kinks and Syd Barrett era Pink Floyd of the late sixties, but there's a definite ambience in both the music and the lyrics which are encapsulated in 'Saturday Picture Show'; one of the new songs and one for anyone old enough to recall the days of Grandpa's cuddles, ice creams on summer sands and all sorts of references to the televisual delights of the era. It dips into an eccentric Jethro Tull lyrical style of Ian Anderson which brings to mind all sorts of Tull and Camel associations.

The touches of flute throughout the record, which begin in 'Songs From The Bilston House', are similarly reminiscent of Anderson's work, and all of a sudden you're starting to hear Anderson-like inflections in some of the vocals, particularly on the processed voice of second new track 'Yesterday's Hero' where Ian Fairburn's fiddle makes an appearance adding to the Folky atmosphere. Stephen Dundon's flute goes on to play a large part in these re-workings and along with the clarinet and sax of Marek Arnold, takes many of the tunes into the casual lounge listening territory.

To be honest, anyone looking for something to nod your head along to might be pushed as there's nothing which blows your socks off, although 'Icarus & Me' comes close to a Tull-like acoustic romp, but this is more of an alternative for a Sunday morning and with twelve songs and over an hour of music, it's also value for money.

Mike Ainscoe

MARCOS POWER TRIP – 'MARCOS POWER TRIP' *(Enigma)* BLUES/SOUL

An Italian trio who play Blues with, they think, a Frank Zappa twist, this is really worth very little of your time. Instrumental in nature, that wouldn't have to be a problem if the music was enervating and exciting; this is Zappa as a paper clip manager.

In most of these tracks, the guitar takes the melody line and then hugs it close, as if afraid to go it alone. It can be so anodyne, like one of those K-Tel records or 'Hooked On Classics'; you know it's not quite what you want, but it'll do.

Alright, alright, 'London Banana' is almost as good as the title, managing to be smoky and choppy at the same time and almost making that silly guitar line fade away. Long and indeed lazy 'Saint Momme' dares you to lift a finger, the guitar aching to become involved then happily not outstaying it's welcome; these are but oases in a sea of banality.

There is frankly little reason to spend time with this album, unless you are a Blues aficionado and even then there are lots of people doing it better; certainly niche, possibly backed into a corner...

Steve Swift

MAVERICK – 'QUID PRO QUO' *(Massacre)* MELODIC ROCK

Don't let the Thrash Metal artwork on the cover fool you, this is Melodic Rock with a classic 1980s vibe. Assuming they were a bunch of young energetic Swedes, I was surprised to find out they were in fact from Belfast. The music itself isn't trying to be clever; it's straight-forward Rock with a bit of Metal muscle here and there. Think Skid Row with a touch of Judas Priest, a bit of Irish Rockers Million Dollar Trash and plenty of melody.

It's lifted by some good singing from Dave Balfour and the music is high energy; twin guitars squall, drums pummel and Balfour's vocals are aided by gang chant choruses. You sense they're putting their all into this and you can almost smell the sweat dripping off them. Northern Irish bands often have a bit of Bluesy grit in their grooves and Maverick are no exception.

There's enough variety here to make this a disc worth repeated plays. Try to get through 'In Our Blood' without pumping your fist in the air... it can't be done. 'One More Day' is a song condemning killing in the name of religion that has one of the best hooks and would work well live as a sing-along. Indeed, the gang chant vocals are made to be sung by Rock crowds.

There's the Sleazier Rock of 'Electric' and 'Rock 'N' Roll Lady' comes across like Crash Diet or Crazy Lixx, 'Shackled' has a good guitar intro and 'Side By Side' has one of the best melodies. The lyrics cover a wide range of themes, some serious, some more "Rock 'n' Roll" but they all share a similar concept. This concept is the title of the record 'Quid Pro Quo'

so there's an element of "something for something" happening to the protagonists in the songs.

They've shared stages with 1980's bands like Faster Pussycat and Tigertailz and they're not out of their depth in that company. A surprise package and if they replicate the energy on this disc live, then these Irish lads are onto something.

Duncan Jamieson

MAXX12 – 'SPECIAL FORCES' *(Independent)* HARD ROCK

"Don't change your focus in the hope of getting one" so opined the great XTC. Maxx12 could do with this, as they sometimes run hither and thither in an attempt to please us but never too far that they lose sight of themselves.

'Maxx12' may be as obvious as expensive beer at a gig, but the choppy doubled solo and Glammy goodness is evidence of life; 'S.A.M' works on the back of a rumbling bass whilst Albert Mendez can't help but sound like Ozzy Osbourne but almost falls off his chair when a Glammy cowbell sashays in. 'Fools' though is the best thing here, purely because it doesn't try to be tough or smart, just smiley and sunny, catchy too and with a solo chunkier than a Rocky Road cookie but 'Burnin' Down In Paradise' is full of Mötley Crüe goodness with Kiss Krass opening.

As the album progresses, the quality dips a little but this is fun to be with, even if the variable mix makes it seem like some tracks came from other eras; not Max Payne but not Max enjoyment either.

Steve Swift

MAXXWELL – 'TABULA RASA' *(Fastball)* HEAVY METAL

Maxxwell hails from Switzerland, a place more famous for Edelweiss and Toblerone than Rock, although in fairness they have contributed Krokus and Celtic Frost.

They've recently recruited Venezuelan-born vocalist Gilberto Meléndez and what a find he is. 'Partykings' is a Rocker with the vocal being a little Udo Dirkschneider i.e. with a nice gravelly roar. 'Fuck It!' is heavier and both the vocal and song structure remind me of Toseland. It's hard to pick a favourite track as they are all eminently likeable, but I think possibly 'Nothing Changes My Mind' is it; driving and riffy with an almost Journey-esque chorus, it changes tempo without ever losing pace. 'Trails Of Hate' has a more Germanic feel, lead guitarist Hef Häfliger along with rhythm guitarist Cyril Montavon deliver some Industrial riffs overlaid with choral harmonies. This leads into another head-banging Rocker, 'Cause I'm Lovin' It' followed by "the ballad" – 'Gone Forever' – albeit it's heavier and more powerful than most.

'Fallin' Down' is groove-driven and heavy and is followed by the earworm of the album in 'Man Of Steel'; I can guarantee you'll be singing the slightly cheesy chorus from this one for days. 'Never Let You Go' is a more traditional ballad relying heavily on harmonies in the chorus. 'On Your Face' is hard and heavy followed by 'Backstabber' which has slightly Red Hot Chili Peppers-type rapping interspersed with plain old Rock. The album closes out with another Power Metal ballad, 'Run Or Hide', which demonstrates Meléndez' range of style.

I don't think anyone could argue that Maxxwell are pushing the envelope regards style or content, in fact a few times I felt I recognised the songs as their musical influences are clearly on display. That said, this is an extremely likeable album of songs, none of which make me want to hit the "skip" button and that in itself is laudatory.

Maxxwell would be a great addition to a festival line-up. This release is a great driving album, maybe not ground breaking but it won't be coming out of my CD changer any time soon

Helen Bradley Owers

MAYBESHEWILL – 'FAIR YOUTH' *(Superball)* PROGRESSIVE

A big round of applause for Maybeshewill, a five-piece from Leicester with a highly commendable, self sufficient attitude and approach to their work. Having managed and self-recorded their three full-length albums to date, their DIY style and aspirations have paid off with their fourth effort being released through Superball Music and it sees their ambitions being pushed into a new area.

Taking the concept of the album which presents a musical solution to dealing with world issues and problems (if only it were it that easy!), they've based their instrumental compositions on themes of nostalgia, disconnection and the constant feeling of motion which they relate to having spent long periods away from home on the road.

The series of four and five minute soundscapes commences with the short '…' leading into 'In Amber' which pretty much encapsulates the sound of the whole album which on the first few listens tends to stand as a whole without any particular track standing out. It comes across as a combination of elements of the sort of sweeping grandeur you get with Anathema and parts which recall the spinning guitars and piano you'd find in some of Coldplay's music.

However given time and effort, like most music, different aspects of Maybeshewill start to rise up and make themselves heard. Having experimented with strings and electronic on 2011's 'I Was Here For A Moment, Then I Was Gone', there are a whole gamut of styles coming together; washes of shimmering guitar mix with electronica while ambitious orchestration merges with what borders on Hip Hop beats.

Both 'Asiatic' (which has some violin motifs alongside a repetitive piano figure) and closing track 'Volga' (a gentle piano verging on classical building slowly and evolving into a gentle choir of voices) offer up something which rolls along very much akin to a travelogue soundtrack. On the more mainstream side, they do their best Coldplay sound-alike in 'Sanctuary'; just a vocal added and you'd have a stadium filling anthem. They also aren't afraid either to have a go at something which is totally bombastic and over the top as they do in 'Waking Life', which then suddenly switches gear into a calm after the storm moment.

How well does their Instrumental Rock stand up? The success of the likes of Mike Oldfield, Tangerine Dream and the lengthy passages of instrumental music to be found in the Progressive genre suggest that it's a rich vein to be plundered and with 'Fair Youth' Maybeshewill are on their way to doing exactly that.

Mike Ainscoe

MEDEN AGAN – 'LACRIMA DEI' *(No Regrets)* SYMPHONIC METAL

In ancient Greece, the temple of Apollo at Delphi bore the inscription 'Meden Agan' meaning 'Nothing In Excess'. Doing something in moderation means not doing it excessively, I am not sure how that applies exactly to this Greek-based (Athens) band. Formed, strangely, in Paris in 2005 by guitarist Diman Koutsogiannopoulos (although the band only go by their first names on the album, perhaps wisely?) the band started life as a male-fronted Technical/Progressive/Symphonic band and released the album 'Illusions' in late 2007, before eventually recruiting twenty-one year old Soprano Iliana Tsakiraki. They then released the rather ambitious 'Erevos Aenaon' ('Eternal Darkness') in 2011 after a couple of demos saw the light of day with most of the songs making it to the album. What was apparent was the superb musicianship by guitarist Koutsogiannopoulos and keyboardist Tolis Mikroulis in particular. I believe they are the two main song-writers, which would make sense.

Fast forward to now and we have third album 'Lacrima Dei' released with new Operatic Soprano vocalist Maya Kampaki replacing Tsakiraki, who joined Enemy Of Reality. What is immediately obvious is how mature sounding the new compositions come across, the phenomenally talented Mikroulis has woven his keys around the songs and created some intrinsically complicated aural masterpieces. Guitarist Koutsogiannopoulos has expertly reigned in his excesses (note to band name) from the previous album and delivered more structured elements to his playing. The core rhythm section of bassist/growler Aris Nikoleris (also moonlighting in Memorain with a brand new album out incidentally) and drummer Panos Paplomatas provide a very solid backbone and the songs allow a very expressive Kampaki to operate between clean vocals and Operatic almost at will.

Opening song 'Divine Wrath' is fast, Symphonic and bombastic whilst the title track has a lovely keyboard refrain pitted against a measured beat and riffs with Kampaki singing in a lower register as bassist Nikoleris contributes some clean male vocals. 'Embrace The Sorrow' has interesting instrumentation with Nikoleris' prominent bass line intermingled with an almost Eastern flavour and a beguiling keyboard and drum interplay.

Nikoleris' Death Metal growls are the counterpoint to Kampaki's Operatic Soprano in 'Portal Of Fear' with its Baroque-flavour and incessant double bass drumming with Koutsogiannopoulos providing marching riffs and wistful arpeggios. With the Pop-flavoured keys and Kampaki's clean melodic singing colouring 'Everlasting Pain', the band decided to shoot a video for it.

'Devoid Of Sanity' has Progressive, almost Power Metal, elements alongside the over-the-top Symphonic whilst 'Loss' shows a softer side to Meden Agan with a piano and acoustic ballad that picks up the pace further along.

All in all, this is a band for lovers of Symphonic Metal to watch out for.

Carl Buxton

RATED X – 'RATED X' *(Frontiers)* HARD ROCK

Rated X features ex-Rainbow/Deep Purple vocalist Joe Lynn Turner along with veteran drummer Carmine Appice (who played with Turner in Mother's Army) and bassist Tony Franklin, a colleague of Appice's from Blue Murder. Originally the project was due to feature ex-Kiss guitarist Bruce Kulick, but due to his commitments with Grand Funk Railroad, former Mother's Army and Night Ranger guitarist Jeff Watson was recruited instead. When that didn't work out, Turner brought in his long time colleague Karl Cochran.

Cochran had co-written a lot of Turner's solo material and played with the vocalist both live and in the studio. He fitted perfectly with the band and everything started to fall into place, until he was tragically struck down by a stroke and paralyzed down one side.

While the guitarist was incapacitated, Brazen Abbot six-stringer Nikolo Kotzev completed the remaining guitar duties and under the watchful eye of Pat Regan, who mixed the record, it's a seamless join. Despite recording their parts alone and drafting in an extra guitarist, this truly sounds like a BAND.

'Get Back My Crown' comes roaring out of the blocks with Turner's ageless voice sat atop the pulsating rhythm section and blistering guitar work. There's the Funk-tinge to 'This Is Who I Am' which advises you give a stern middle finger to anybody telling you what to do, while 'Fire And Ice' features a classic Franklin bass intro before the band join in. It's a real anthem, dwarfed only by the sprawling 'Lhasa', an epic track which has hints of Blue Murder, Pink Floyd and Led Zeppelin all swirling around the band's own identity.

The album also owes a lot to the contributions of Alessandro Del Vecchio, who handles production and mastering, along with co-writing two thirds of the material and providing some masterful keyboard additions. The album isn't all heads down Rockers either, there are some lighter moments with 'Maybe Tonight' and 'You Are The Music' where Turner soars in the final part leaving many singers half his age in the dust.

They may have faced all manner of problems making the record, but the finished result was so worth it. There are nods to countless classic bands through this record, without aping any one in particular. What you have here are three musical veterans, bolstered by a hungry guitarist itching to prove himself. You expect quality from Turner, Appice and Franklin, Del Vecchio's track record speaks for itself and Cochran (who I'm delighted to report is making progress in his recovery) delivers in spades. With a big sound, a great singer and strong material that only improves with each listen, Rated X gets a huge thumbs up from me.

James Gaden

MESSIAH'S KISS – 'GET YOUR BULLS OUT' *(Massacre)* HEAVY METAL

"Tongues firmly in cheeks" is a phrase that always makes me worried and, coupled with the jokey title, I wasn't expecting much from Messiah's Kiss. So, as usual, there's a lesson for me about judging an album by its cover and all that tosh, because 'Get Your Bulls Out' is actually pretty good.

Hailing from Germany, America & England, the band also has every member throwing their hat into the writing pot and if you add to that a seven year hiatus (forced due to illness within the band) you get an album that several brains have been working on for some time. The overall style is Classic Metal straight from the 1980s, but with enough personality to avoid sounding too dated. Several songs would have sounded good from Skid Row in their

prime, with others having a more Iron Maiden-tinge, but all of them sound like Messiah's Kiss, which is exactly how it should be.

'Get Your Bulls Out' has plenty of power and passion and no little talent. There are no pretensions, just fourteen, full-on, melodic Heavy Rock tracks that never fail to entertain. They may not win awards but are rather good at what they do and what they do is Rock… check them out.

Alan Holloway

MICHAEL JESSEN – 'MEMORIES' *(Massacre)* — MELODIC ROCK

The debut album from Danish guitar player Michael Jessen, 'Memories' is a record that promises Melodic Rock with emphasis firmly on the melodies. Joining forces with journeyman singer Goran Edman, the pair put together an EP which impressed sufficiently to gain a deal for a full album. With Edman on board, the material has every chance and opener 'Broken Heart' ticks all the boxes with its perfect balance of guitar riffing and a big, soaring chorus.

'My Own Funeral' is a slower burner but no less effective after repeated listens, while 'Blackwater' bounces along with help from a guest guitar solo from Europe's John Norum. 'The Rose' takes the listener into firm power ballad territory while 'Prisoner' is a melancholy, sparse piano-led tune.

The primary emphasis however is for big choruses interspersed with big guitar riffs, as evidenced on 'Dreams Die Hard' and 'Lost In L.A.'. The album closes with an instrumental 'Freefall' which is okay and overall it all passes by rather quickly. The reason for that is because the album clocks in at 40 minutes – remember records that did that? That's actually a big plus for me and I respect Jessen for it; it's clear he hasn't padded out his record for the sake of filling up a release and sometimes you don't want to listen to the same guy for sixty or seventy minutes!

It's a bright, punchy little album and while it's not something that blew me away, it's a more than listenable effort bolstered by the usual high quality vocal work from Edman; worth checking out.

James Gaden

MONSTER MAGNET – 'MILKING THE STARS: A RE-IMAGINING OF LAST PATROL' *(Napalm)* — HEAVY METAL

This hypnotic album will possess you instantly; you will be sucked into the darkest depths of the creative minds that is Monster Magnet. The opening instrumental track 'Let The Circus Burn' takes you on mystical nightmare – a dream-like feeling where you're spellbound to their musical fantasy. There is so much texture and layering with the synthesisers/keys, drums, guitars and sound effects that are done so imaginatively well. The song is seven minutes long and the whole time you're engaged; it's so coherent and fascinating to listen to, as there is so much going on. There is a feeling of each instrument adding its own part of the story, constantly building and adapting. What an opening!

'Mindless One '68' contains shadows of the dark past of The Doors. The keys have shades of Ray Manzarek's work; it is incredible and forms such an entrancing atmosphere. Bass player Jim Baglino is such a key player as well, his phrasing really adding depth and boldness to the track and there's such chemistry with drummer Bob Pantella.

The album takes a turn and drives you out of the depths of darkness with a fast paced track with playful Bluesy riffs, that would be 'End Of Time (B-3)'. It's a song you can really get into and sing along – giving a complete turnaround to the previous tracks. It really shows the craftsmanship in their song-writing.

MM's groovy soul escapes in 'Hallelujah (Fuzz And Swamp)' and there's an instant infatuation and it is one of the best tracks on the album. It brings a Folk Rock 'n' Roll life to the record thus giving it a fresh new sound.

Vocalist Dave Wyndorf takes a Johnny Cash approach for 'I Live Behind The Clouds (Roughed Up And Slightly Spaced)' suiting the sound immensely as they do with their known Black Sabbath influence for 'Goliath Returns'. This is an influence, not a representation, MM's stamp has been struck on it several times.

The whole album is unpredictable and this proves their ability to keep a listener on their toes. Monster Magnet captures the spirit of 1960s music movement for modern times. It is a Psychedelic vortex ready to transform and feed your muso ears.

Lara Kisel

MOON SAFARI – 'LIVE IN MEXICO' *(Blomljud)* — PROGRESSIVE

It would be something of an understatement to say that I have been longing for this album ever since I saw the band play at the Classic Rock Show in September 2013 (see review in Issue 60). That gig now sits in the top five best gigs I've attended, so a recording of it or a similar show became an aspiration. Fortunately the band played the Baja Prog Festival in April this year and recorded that set, albeit it's not the entire set we heard that evening at the CRS which is the only disappointment with what is a fabulous representation of the band's immense talent. Actually, the lack of crowd atmosphere doesn't do the band justice either.

I still find it incredible that six young guys have written, arranged and produced music this exquisite, melodic, interesting and with the most fantastic vocal harmonies, but I'm so glad they do.

Using the delightful but uncredited 'Kids' as an intro they move seamlessly into 'Too Young To Say Goodbye' with its wonderful theme that combines all six band members perfectly and features one of the best choruses you could wish to hear. The vocal arrangement is spectacular and belies the relative youth of the band members. It's not wimpy either, there's plenty of power in amongst the inherent beauty of the song.

'Heartland' demonstrates their versatility as a different band member takes the lead vocal; the track drives along at a brisk pace with what I think of as a Genesis 'Lamb…' bass sound. The soloing is terrific and there's yet another memorable chorus and an expertly executed A Cappella section towards the end of the song.

'Barfly' opens in heavy fashion and is undoubtedly Prog as it mixes different feels across just five minutes or so. Their creativeness and skill, if not sound, reminds me of 10CC and Queen with the multi-faceted 'Mega Moon' being a prime example; a track that bobs and weaves through several styles from laid back, through Queen-like choral work, bits that nod at Transatlantic and sections bordering on Prog Metal. Brilliant!

The quality just keeps on coming; having front-loaded the set with shorter songs it's now time for the epics and 'A Kid Called Panic' is first up and it ticks all the right Prog boxes in terms of style, melody and substance. 'Crossed The Rubicon' is a demonstration of vocal excellence in terms of arrangement and execution; reminiscent of the Beach Boys at times.

SISTER SIN – 'BLACK LOTUS' *(Victory)* — HEAVY METAL

No nonsense Metal is Sister Sin's speciality. Although Swedish, they have an almost Germanic efficiency, mixing Metal riffage with melodic hooks that are always street and never sweet.

Lead singer Liv has a power not to be outdone by the scything guitars or the drilling drums. She sounds like she must have a mean look on her face as she snarls out these songs, there's a certain aggression to her voice and she's got serious attitude; I wouldn't rate my chances in a fist fight with her.

It's a simple formula but they milk it well. A couple of decent Rockers get things underway but it goes up a gear for the more epic sounding 'Au Revoir'. 'Desert Queen' keeps it on the boil and then 'Count Me Out' is the catchiest track of all, melding their brutal attack with a good (parental guidance needed) hook. 'The Jinx' is the surprise package as it starts off as a slow acoustic number and is very much a departure from the rest of the songs. However, it's a welcome change of pace that builds nicely. This track also shows another side to Liv's voice, proving she can really sing with the best of them. It also challenges those who think their big riffs, puff and bluster are one dimensional.

While there's not a chorus quite as hum-tastic as 'Sound Of The Underground' from their 'True Sound Of The Underground' album, there's a cohesiveness and a message of Metal intent here that makes this their most balanced album (top to bottom) so far. It doesn't muck about and its direct Metal shares a lot in common with the likes of Accept or Judas Priest with a smidgeon of Modern Power Metal. Black leather certainly required when listening to this.

Duncan Jamieson

Naturally they close with an epic, all twenty-five minutes of 'Lover's End, Part III: Skellefteå Serenade' which is a phenomenal piece of work full of Prog goodness. I'm in awe.

Gary Marshall

NEONFLY – 'STRANGERS IN PARADISE' *(Inner Wound)* — POWER METAL

London-based, multi-national, Power Metal band Neonfly haven't been blessed with the best of luck since their inception a few years back. Unable to find a permanent vocalist, Shy's Tony Mills helped them out on their 2008 debut EP 'Clever Disguise' before the U.K./French band hooked up with Irishman Willy Norton just prior to their first full album (2011's 'Outshine The Sun').

After regular touring they had all their equipment stolen whilst out with Magnum earlier this year, but thankfully things began to pick up when they signed with Inner Wound and set about recording their second album with none other than Pink Cream 69 bassist Dennis Ward, before heading out on tour again for a well-received stint with Dragonforce.

To say that 'Strangers In Paradise' is another step in the right direction would be a bit of an understatement, the band have added several more strings to their bows and made a superbly mature record that should see them gain admirers of not only Power Metal, but Symphonic, Prog, Hard Rock and even AOR.

Mostly written by guitarist Frederick Thunder, Neonfly have assembled a fine collection of songs that run the gamut from high-speed, double-bass drum led outings like 'Whispered Dreams' and 'Fierce Battalions' to the majestic power ballad 'Rose In Bloom' and the grandiose instrumental 'Aztec Gold'. The band, completed by French drummer Boris Le Gal, bassist Paul Miller and guitarist Patrick Harrington, can change tempos at the drop of a hat, as they do on the infectious 'Sons Of Liberty' and the nicely arranged 'Chasing The Night', or even handle the subtlety of the acoustic-based ballad 'Falling Star' with aplomb. Norton's vocals are superb throughout, imbuing his high-tenor voice with just the right amount of menace or soaring like a bird as the song dictates. Just check out the tuneful 'Better Angels' or the chunky 'Highways To Nowhere' for proof, and as good as the twin guitar work and bombastic rhythm section are, it's Norton that will give the band its distinctive sound.

If you're going to bring in a keyboard player to help out then you might as well get a great one, and Vanden Plas maestro Gunter Werno is certainly that, bringing extra mood and colour to the table and raising the likes of 'Heart Of The Sun' to a Symphonic highlight. There's also no doubt that Ward's studio expertise is exactly what Neonfly needed, a perfect balance of muscle and melody running through even the heaviest material and giving the whole thing an old-school sheen without losing any of their power or contemporary edge.

If there's any justice, 'Strangers In Paradise' should see Neonfly progress from perennial support band to headlining their own tours.

Phil Ashcroft

NICKELBACK – 'NO FIXED ADDRESS' *(Universal/Republic)* — HARD ROCK

It's hard to believe that this is Nickelback's eighth album and that the Vancouver outfit has been around for almost twenty years, selling thirty million albums in the process. Despite the same perceived hatred afforded to them as Justin Bieber, Nickelback are clearly liked by someone; their success since 'How You Remind Me' proves it.

"Too Pop to Rock" and "too Rock to Pop" is one of the many taglines given to Nickelback. Here lies the genius of the band and Chad Kroeger, they're both; simultaneously churning out lightweight Pop tunes (think 'When We Stand Together') combined with active Rock staples like 'Burn It To The Ground'. But all the songs sound the same right? All the hits are rehashes of 'How You Remind Me' right? Wrong… 'No Fixed Address' is the antithesis of that formulaic perception.

A small change was evident on the ballad heavy 'Here And Now'; perhaps the bands worst since 'The Long Road'. '…Address' goes the whole nine yards highlighting a trend for Rock bands to chance their arm in the Pop genre. But it feels contrived, as if Kroeger has analysed what's current in mainstream Pop music using a computer programme and then copied and pasted all the relevant bits. The Maroon 5-like 'She Keeps Me Up' – a song about cocaine – is an uncomfortable slice of Funk Pop, likewise the horn-led Funk of 'Got Me Running Round' featuring rapper Flo Rida.

Other clunkers arrive thick and fast in the form of the mawkish 'Satellite' or the even

more maudlin 'Miss You'; the faux Country Rock of 'Sister Sin' sounds tired and can't hold a torch to a song like 'This Afternoon'. It's really left to the excellent opener 'Million Miles An Hour' – a typical Nickelback Rocker in the mold of 'This Means War' – the anti-establishment 'Edge Of A Revolution' and 'Get Em Up' (a tongue in cheek song about a botched bank robbery) to identify this as a Nickelback album. The mid-paced staples such as 'Make Me Believe Again', 'The Hammer's Coming Down' and generic single 'What Are You Waiting For?' are decent enough but become tainted by the other dross on offer.

Nickelback perhaps should be congratulated for trying something different but in trying to do so they've tried to be all things to all men and it feels artificial. Trying to capitalise on every music genre is a great business idea but there's a sense that 'No Fixed Address' is a manufactured album; an album that is as far away from the meaningful angst ridden Rock of 'Silver Side Up' as it can be and who's eclectic nature is the stick that its critics will now seek to beat them with rather than laud them for.

Mike Newdeck

NITROGODS – 'RATS & RUMOURS' *(Steamhammer/SPV)* HARD ROCK

As Airbourne face criticism for sounding too much like AC/DC, Nitrogods must face similar accusations of being too close to Motörhead. The German Heavy Metal trio wantonly flaunt their ear-bursting levels of rugged Blues lead by a hairy bass playing lead vocalist who sounds like he lubricates his throat with whiskey, gravel and fire, and bathes it all in a plume of cigarette smoke. That clearly sounds like you-know-who but in the world of Rock 'n' Roll can you really have too much of a good thing?

'Rats & Rumours' is the second album from Nitrogods and carries more of a Rockabilly shuffle than the hard 'n' heavy, sweaty debut. You just have to listen to the likes of the title track, 'Automobile' and the superb 'Nothing But Trouble' to hear that they still possess the no-messing-about down and dirty Rock and Roll sound.

The glorious guitar tone from Henny Wolter, who also played in Bastards with Motorhead's Fast Eddie Clarke (it's a small world), clearly lends to more comparisons to be made but also sets them apart from any of the other Hard Rock bands who churn out 'Ace Of Spades' knock-offs. His simple yet infectious riffs often reach levels of true class.

Decades served in the business can be heard in the tight playing and less-is-more song-writing delivered with a wink and swagger; 'Dirty Old Man' being the stomping example. The fact they are a relatively new band matters not when each member is well versed in the world of Rock. The excellent production must have a toast raised too for allowing the ragged edges to shines as character and not get in the way of a terrific album.

So the answer then is no, you can never have too much of a good thing because when it's as good as this... there's always room for more.

Dan Bond

PAIN OF SALVATION – 'FALLING HOME' *(Inside Out)* PROGRESSIVE

Over the last decade or so you could never accuse Pain Of Salvation of being predictable; the Swedes have released records that include just about every style other than the Progressive Metal they originally became known for. 'Falling Home' is an acoustic album recorded in the studio, showcasing re-imagined versions of mostly songs from their recent albums, along with two unusual covers and one new song; the title track. Leader and main song-writer Daniel Gildenlow is joined here by former bassist Gustaf Hielm, long-time drummer Leo Margarit and the two most recent additions to POS, keyboard player Daniel Karlsson and the talented Ragnar Zolberg on guitars and vocals.

Just to confuse you right from the beginning, the version of the classic 'Stress' from the 'Entropia' record is played in a Jazz style but retains the beautifully arranged vocal harmonies. The only other pre-2007 song – 'Chain Sling' from 'Remedy Lane' – is done pretty faithfully without losing any of the intensity. There's a three-song section from 'Scarsick' with the brilliant 'Mrs. Modern Mother Mary', the syncopated rhythms of 'Flame To The Moth' and the sombre 'Spitball' not straying too much from the originals whilst the angst-ridden 'Linoleum' is the sole representative from the divisive 'Road Salt One'. 'Road Salt Two' provides a couple of highlights in the short and snappy 'To The Shoreline' and the great ballad '1979' but the most curious choices are the two cover versions.

I could really do without the fairly straight version of Lou Reed's 'Perfect Day' because I've never really cared for the original, but the one that will get the most attention is undoubtedly Dio's 'Holy Diver', played in a "Lounge Lizard" style with a Reggae section and an instrumental Jazz workout in the middle. Gildenlow's vocal is genius on this, and whilst I'm sure many Dio fans will be up in arms, it's refreshing to hear someone do something a little different with the song.

The standard jewel case version of the album ends with the new song 'Falling Home', a superb ballad and one of the most normal songs they've ever written; if you go for the limited edition digi-pack or the vinyl LP you also get 'She Likes To Hide' and 'King Of Loss'.

Well-produced and infinitely listenable, 'Falling Home' is a great album that proves that a good song is a good song, no matter how you dress it up.

Phil Ashcroft

SOEN – 'TELLURIAN' *(Spinefarm)* PROGRESSIVE

Swedish Progressive Metallers Soen returns with their sophomore album 'Tellurian'. Described in some quarters as a "super-group", the band consists of drummer Martin Lopez (ex-Opeth, Amon Amarth), vocalist Joel Ekelof (Willowtree), guitarist Joakim Platbarzdis and bassist Stefan Stenberg who has replaced Steve DiGiorgio.

The album begins with a short instrumental with Latin influences and then thunderous drums and crashing guitars herald the arrival of first single 'Tabula Rasa' which contains lots of complicated riffs and hypnotic vocals from Ekelof, especially during the second half of the song which is more mellow. 'Kuraman' is a cracking track sounding like Dream Theater in parts (shock horror) and again featuring powerful drumming from Lopez. 'The Words' is the closest thing to a ballad on the album and Ekelof's haunting vocals are complimented by Stenberg's Jazzy bass and the song also has some wonderful orchestration.

'Pluton' also has a monstrous intro with drums, guitar and bass producing a really Progressive and powerful sound with a lighter shade during the middle – great song! 'Koniskas' opens with another pronounced bass line from Stenberg and Lopez showers us with more South American fills and amazing time signatures.

Platbarzdis must get a mention for his exceptional playing throughout, the only complaint I have is that there are no guitar solos, however, that is a minor quibble and does not at all detract from the very high quality of this exceptional piece of work. He also produced 'Tellurian' and with the help of David Bottrill's mixing (Tool, Smashing Pumpkins, Muse, King Crimson) we have a great sounding album with each instrument being allowed to breathe.

'Ennui' contains more great bass work from Stenberg and some awesome riffs from Platbarzdis and Lopez again proves why he is one of the most respected drummers in this genre.

'Void' and 'The Other's Fall' complete the fifty-four minute (where did that go… yes it is that good) album. Both tracks are very Progressive and display how the band's song-writing has developed. They are longer than the rest of the songs, both clocking in between eight and nine minutes and with this extra time the band have the luxury to go in different directions.

A special mention must go to the stunning artwork of Mexican painter Jose Luis Lopez Galvan.

Soen's debut 'Cognitive' was compared to Tool in many quarters and that album had more of an Alternative feel to it. 'Tellurian' is a totally different beast and I feel privileged being able to review it and I'm not sure my scribblings can do it justice. I really can't wait to see where their next album takes us. For me, this is a contender for album of the year!

Az Chaudhry

PERVY PERKIN – 'INK' *(RockCD)* PROGRESSIVE

One thing Pervy Perkin can't be accused of is a lack of ambition. Releasing a double album with one disc entitled 'Book Of Equinox' and the other being 'Book Of Solstice', that clock in at well over the two-hour mark (housed in a fold out digi-pack complete with a twenty plus page booklet) is certainly aiming high. Not for these Spaniards the cheap and cheerful or a rough and ready low budget release, these guys mean business.

Formed back in 2011 by Alvaro Luis (guitar), Carly Pajaron (drums) and Dante (guitar) and later joined by Ugo Fellone on keyboards and lead singer Alejandro Macho to complete the line-up, PP set out with the intent to produce an ambitious Prog Rock masterpiece taking in an array of styles and moods.

As a debut album, 'Ink' is remarkable in its scope and ambition and for that PP must be applauded. The album certainly covers a myriad of styles from the Spaghetti Western-influenced 'Opening Credits' to the Gregorian Chant-infused 'Of Echoes And Reflections' and it all showcases a band who aren't afraid to spread their wings.

Musically the album features some strong performances particularly in the guitar and keyboard department with the opening of 'Memories Of The Water' notably creating a tasteful ambience.

With two tracks clocking in at over twenty minutes, this is not an album that can be listened to casually; it requires work... a lot of work, to penetrate the complexities before some of the subtleties really show themselves. At the more basic end of the scale 'Shades Under A City Lamppost' is outstanding with its Jean Michel Jarre style opening before heading into a breathtakingly haunting piano melody that proves sometimes less can be more and those simple chord progressions overlain by a dreamy layer of synths really do induce goose bumps.

It's not perfect by any stretch of the imagination. Some judicious editing could have been employed to cut some of the fat and at times it does feel that there are tempo changes just for the sake of it. Macho is also something of an acquired taste; at times his vocals fit the piece but occasionally they are either too low in the mix or a little on the flat side.

Overall, 'Ink' is a promising start by a new band to the Prog arena and shows that they have the ability and creativity to mix it with the big boys (with a little more work) but quite why they chose the name Pervy Perkin is anyone's guess?!

Mick Burgess

PHOENIX AGAIN – 'LOOK OUT' *(Independent)* INSTRUMENTAL

Here's an interesting album from a band with two distinct incarnations and a curious history; in both cases, it's very much a family affair. The original Phoenix dates back to 1981, a real life "band of brothers" from Brescia, Italy, that featured the Lorandi boys Claudio, Sergio and Antonio along with drummer Silvano Silva. The original band dissolved in 1998, after several line-up changes, leaving little behind by way of recorded output.

After the death of the eldest Lorandi brother (Claudio), the original members decided to resurrect the band and so we now have Phoenix Again. They released the commemorative album 'ThreeFour' in 2010, and now we have 'Look Out' – a predominantly instrumental album of 1970's and 1980's influenced Progressive Rock, with the emphasis very much on "Rock"! The current line-up, which still features Sergio (guitars), Antonio (bass) and Silvano, is augmented by Marco and Georgio Lorandi (sons of Antonio, guitars and percussion respectively) and the keyboards and cello of Andrea Piccinelli.

The first thing that strikes the listener is the sheer quality of the musicianship and composition. The second is the quality of the production. All are quite remarkable from a little known band with a relatively "light" discography. Check out, for example, the near Gregorian intro to opener 'Adso Da Melk' and the fused Blues/Jazz/Prog extravaganza it becomes. Or check out the clean guitar lines of 'Summer' and the relentless attack of 'Winter'. There are even hints of an early Black Sabbath influence in the drama of 'Oigres'. Title track 'Look Out' is a joyful (if slightly overlong) Prog Blues romp while 'The Endless Battle' gives the album a real mid-point energy boost. A personal favourite is album closer 'Dance Of The Three Clowns', on which the band displays a deft touch and venture successfully into the world of Orchestral Rock.

If I have a doubt, it's merely that the album is pitching to a niche market, and is unlikely to have significant crossover appeal. The general absence of vocals doesn't help, though I'm not sure that their presence on the well-intentioned 'Invisible Shame' is entirely successful.

'Look Out' is surprisingly pleasing and enjoyable stuff from a generation-spanning bunch with an interesting past. At the risk of being tautological, if it sounds like your kind of thing, then you'll probably dig it.

Michael Anthony

STARBYNARY – 'DARK PASSENGER' *(Bakerteam)* POWER METAL

Technology affords us opulence at every turn. The transduction of the analog world into a series of digits has been no more profound than within the music industry. Increased speed and capacity has grown exponentially, comfortably allowing musicians the ability to collaborate with people from around the world without ever leaving their own location.

This newfound (not to mention virtual) reality gives rise to the so-called project band which can loosely be defined as a series of musicians that, regardless of pedigree, are capable of creating fully-formed musical ideas without ever having played as a collective. Like most things, it sometimes works and other times, the resulting music sounds sterile and forced. However, it is with project band Starbynary where things get interesting.

As far as the members are concerned, their collective resume exceeds three decades of writing and performing Metal music. The core band consists of vocalist Joe Caggianelli (Derdian), guitarist Leo Giraldi (Trieste) and bassist Luigi Accardo (Cagliari). The ensemble for 'Dark Passenger' is rounded out by drummer Diego Ralli and none other than Mike LePond from the massively respected Progressive Metal band Symphony X.

The song-writing, musicianship and production are all of the highest calibre and deserving of accolades. '...Passenger' is a concept album based on the book, 'Darkly Dreaming Dexter' by Jeff Lindsay (and now TV series 'Dexter'). Not being familiar with either, I cannot comment as to the accuracy of setting the storyline to music. Regardless, the songs all stand on their own, with or without a common theme binding them together.

This is a seriously impressive debut that is required listening for both casual fans and aficionados of European Melodic Power Metal. The drumming is infectious, the melodies are majestic and each member is a commander of their own instrument. 'Dark Passenger' is essential for fans of DragonForce, Gamma Ray and Astra.

Brent Rusche

PLANETHARD – 'NOW' *(Scarlet)* MODERN/ALTERNATIVE

In the tenth year since their founding, Planethard have brought out their fourth studio album, 'Now'. It's not an album that's going to shower you with the glitter of originality but it's driven and heavy, characterised by a strong, chunky guitar sound and a muscular drum beat.

The band show their mellower side in 'Neverfailing Superstar' and 'Don't Say Goodbye', the latter of which brings in a more general Hard Rock style and some great vocalisation towards the end by Davide Merletto. There's a tendency for the heavy sound to become a little stiff and rigid but the rhythm flows better in 'Inglorious Time'. The higher pitched guitar on 'Shall We Be Safe' also provides a nice contrast to the otherwise built-up texture throughout the album.

The overall tone is pretty brooding, held together by the tight rhythm section of bassist Alex Furia and drummer Stefano Arrigoni. A little more diversity between songs to make them more memorable wouldn't go amiss; the band have got the potential with support slots for the likes of Gotthard on their Italian tour. Now all they need is a bit of energy injected into some of their songs.

Sophie Brownlee

POWERWOLF – 'HISTORY OF HERESY: PART II (2009-2012)' *(Metal Blade)* POWER METAL

Powerwolf are the current leads in Germanic Power Metal and they now release 'History of Heresy PII'. If you have never come across this particular wolf pack then best you acquaint yourself; with an extensive back catalogue of some serious tasty riffs and fist thrusting melodies it would be rude not to and this release gives you the chance to do so. 'History... PII' encompasses the greats from 'Bible Of The Beast', 'Blood Of The Saints' and the bonus tracks from 'The Sacrilege Symphony' Orchestral album. It is a three disc box-set that comes with a one hundred and twenty-eight page book full of candid stories, backstage tour features and studio reports.

'Catholic In The Morning… Satanist At Night' would attract any Heavy Metal fan, with thrashing double kicks, a rapid rhythm section and haunting lyrics; it just oozes appeal. Now a favorite of many, 'Resurrection By Erection' will hook you in no doubt with its crowd pleasing guitar licks and catchy melody – there will be singing, there will be air guitar, there will be phallus symbols.

'Sanctified With Dynamite' is another crowd pleaser with the same charming effect, there is also the Orchestral version that has been added as well. Attila Dorn's Operatic vocal is astonishing, such a contrast hearing it in a more theatrical, film type sound where it has imaginatively been adapted and works; that said, there is a feeling of "do I take this seriously or not" as the band has such a comic value with some of their work. As an after-thought… this almost has a spoof-like 'Lord Of The Rings' soundtrack feel to it.

'History Of Heresy PII' exhibits some of Powerwolf's most powerful work. If you are new to the band, this album and 'History of Heresy PI' is an excellent way to start. If you are collector and dedicated fan, what's a fan collection without an album you can listen to from start finish, time and time again, with reading material from behind the scenes of the artists you worship.

Lara Kisel

PULSE – 'THE BEST IS NOT GOOD ENOUGH' *(Independent)* HEAVY METAL

If there's one thing that the slow, pitiful demise of record companies has ushered in, it is the home-grown, do it yourself attitude that serves up a plethora of (sometimes excellent) albums often reviewed in these good pages.

However, what those big, bad and often misguided A&R guys, record company exec's and "listening teams" ensured was that, on the whole, the records released sounded like the finished article. Not always good mind, but at least polished to an extent that you knew you had an "album" in your hands. However with the rise of truly independent releases, so we end up with talented youngsters, such as Dutch Eclecto-trio Pulse (not to be confused with the Vince O'Reagan/Paul Hodson-led outfit of the early 2000s) offering up what might be best described as a set of well recorded demos and questionably naming them 'The Best Is Not Good Enough'…

Don't get me wrong, the mix of Thrashy ideas sitting next to slices of Progressive Metal and driving Rock, all hint at real potential and yet you can't quite escape a sound which screams late 1970's budget production. Possibly if Pulse were aiming their entire sound at the up and at 'em, ethos of say, NWOBHMetallers Tank, or Fist, then the rattling drums, thumping bass and squealing guitars wouldn't sound so blatantly low-fi.

Singer Alissa Tissingh does manage to combine the power of Doro to the dynamics of Geddy Lee (it works much better than you'd think), proving she's a real force to be reckoned with, while guitarist Francis Starrk has a neat collection of riffs and solos at his disposal. And yet, it isn't enough to make this album anything more than an interesting curio – if you'd rummaged for hours through the stalls at a record fair for the early demos from some long lost Metal outfit and come up with '…Not Good Enough', you'd treasure it… in a naïve sort of way.

'The Best Is Not Good Enough'? Well on this evidence that would be harsh, after all everyone has to start somewhere, they just don't have to release it immediately to the big wide world.

Steven Reid

RED CIRCUIT – 'HAZE OF NEMESIS' *(Limb)* POWER METAL

No one does Power Metal quite like the Europeans; conquerors like Primal Fear, Avantasia and Powerwolf tear it up like nobody's business keeping the scene vibrant as ever. Funnily enough, all those bands come from Germany which is where you will find rising Power Metal crushers Red Circuit who are gaining traction and in lead vocalist Chity Somapala, they have decent pedigree in their field.

Combining the unbridled upward trajectory of great Power Metal songs with the thoughtful complexity of Progressive Metal, RC combines the two with a slick ease. Two previous releases in 'Homeland' and 'Trance State' have set the wheels in motion but with album number three, 'Haze Of Nemesis', the car is racing into the sunset.

The guitars are not quite as heavy as previous releases but this allows Markus Teske's chilling atmospherics and Michael Stein's unshakable drumming to breathe. If his previous work didn't convince you that ex-Avalon and Firewind lead singer Somapala has one of the most underrated voices in the melodic sphere, then this surely will. His soaring high range is now backed up by a soulful, hard-fought tone landing him somewhere between Bob Catley and Robin Zander which works wonderfully when tracks like opener 'Oceans Apart' are musically relatively unchallenging but call for a huge set of lungs. 'My Lonely Heaven' and 'My Serenade' ooze epic quality from every pore that intertwines solid power and grand choruses brought to life by stunning song-writing.

Some versions of '...Nemesis' come with an hour-long bonus DVD recorded at the 2011 Progpower U.S.A. XII. RC were working on tracks for the album at the time and the early versions of the new songs bristle with life in a live setting sidling up nicely to the classics like 'Homeland' and 'Under The Sun'.

Written by keyboard player Teske, 'Haze Of Nemesis' may have come too late for such things, but to select it as one of the albums of 2014 would not be a huge stretch, just a demonstration of how much of an improvement Red Circuit have made since that 2006 debut.

Dan Bond

RED ZONE RIDER – 'RED ZONE RIDER' *(Magna Carta)* HARD ROCK

We definitely seem to be in an era of musical collaborations, and whilst I wouldn't class Red Zone Rider as a "super group" of Chickenfoot or Black Country Communion proportions, the trio have all been involved in projects and bands you probably own album's by. Guitarist Vinnie Moore has a successful solo career, played with Alice Cooper and has a decade in UFO under his belt whilst drummer Scot Coogan has been the thunder behind Brides Of Destruction, Ace Frehley, Lynch Mob and Lita Ford. But the glue that holds RZR together is Kelly Keeling, erstwhile singer with Baton Rouge, Michael Schenker, Blue Murder and Trans-Siberian Orchestra, amongst others. What's most surprising here though is Keeling's prowess as a bass player, even adding some fretless work to this organic sounding, seventies influenced Bluesy Hard Rock.

A power trio in every sense of the word, RZR have eleven unfussy tracks based on big riffs, great grooves and Moore's extended guitar solos, but they do it with a great deal of style and no small amount of variety given the limiting format. Opener 'Hell No' echoes both BCC's eponymous title song and Doug Aldrich's Burning Rain, and along with the brooding 'By The Rainbow's End', the pacy Rock and Roller 'Save It' and the gritty 'Never Trust A Woman', exude a definite air of Ritchie Blackmore in his Deep Purple and early Rainbow heyday. 'House Of Light' is a little more succinct and less jam-like – should they want to release a single – and the Funky 'Hit The Road' hints at Stevie Salas, but the slow Blues of the beautifully done 'Cloud Of Dreams' has a great vocal from Keeling and proves they can be subtle when they want to.

To prove how strong the album is, even the later tracks are amongst the highlights, particularly the raw vocals and superb playing on 'The Hand That Feeds You', the classy Hammond backing of 'There's A Knowing', with its early Uriah Heep feel, and the thundering closer 'Count's 77', which is surely at the wrong end of the album and would have made a blistering opener. Mike Varney's sympathetic production aids the loose style of much of this album, making every little nuance audible and overdubbing just the guitar solos, sparse keys and a few backing vocals and letting the free-flowing music and great performances shine.

I've been a Vinnie Moore fan ever since I heard his work on the otherwise disappointing Vicious Rumors debut and subsequent groundbreaking 'Mind's Eye' and 'Time Odyssey' instrumental albums, and even though I've gotten something positive from all the recent UFO releases, I'd go as far as to say this is the best vocal album he's ever appeared on.

Phil Ashcroft

RIDEON – '97X, BAM! THE FUTURE OF ROCK 'N' ROLL' *(Independent)* HARD ROCK

The fact that Rideon are an AC/DC covers band that have progressed to writing their own material shouldn't be too unusual, although one doesn't find too many Italians ascribing to the Aussie veterans cause.

Consisting of vocalist Stefano Pasquali, bassist Fabrizio Del Sette, drummer Andrea Crescini and guitarists Samuele Scatolini (rhythm) and Vincenzo Salamone (lead), they named themselves after AC/DC's song 'Ride On' from 1976's 'Dirty Deeds Done Dirt Cheap'.

There is of course nothing too fancy, technical or blindingly awesome about Rideon but what they do, they do very well indeed. In fact, their gigs combine AC/DC covers with their original songs and it's not always obvious where the join is. For instance 'Strike' is AC/DC Riff 'n' Roll – pure and simple. 'Black Rain' is fast paced DC "in your face" and 'Single Man' is an AC/DC stylised Rocker with a wave carrying melodic sensibility that wouldn't look out of place on 'Powerage'. If you want catchy Hard Rock then give 'I Want A Lady Tonight' a spin – something I'm sure that would have raised a grin or two from Bon Scott himself. Just as relevant is the straight-ahead Hard Rocker 'This Is A Goodbye Ticket' and there's plenty of hard-ass drumming in the gang-type Rocker 'C'mon'.

Scatolini sets up the riff for the hard driving Rock 'n' Roll of 'Listen To My Radio' after its surprising mellow intro, but where Rideon score big points for me is in 'Marta's Song' and the single 'Mothership'. The former is an excellent bass and drum-led riff monster whilst '...Song' just edges the "best tune" on this album with its powerful riffs, melody, and mature sound. Not as AC/DC derivative as most of the other songs, but it contains a very good solo and use of rhythm dynamics; the solid bass and drums really drive the song along too.

As a good time, window down, cruise into town album its right up there for putting a smile on your face and getting your head nodding. The Italians certainly aren't sitting on the side-lines when it comes to Rocking your ass off!

Carl Buxton

RITCHIE DAVID PORTER – 'ROCKIN' THE BLUES' *(High Vibration)* BLUES/SOUL

Although the title is 'Rockin' The Blues' and it does at times, there's a lot of acoustic Blues throughout this record. That's an observation, not a criticism. The acoustic setting often acts as the backbone to the songs but Richie David Porter adds some stinging electric guitar over the top. He's got a nice clean guitar sound and the contrast from acoustic to electric has the effect of amplifying the impact the electric solos have.

Porter is from Birmingham, not Alabama, but up the M40. Although an area renowned for its influence on Metal, apart from the heavier 'Into The Darkness', Porter eschews this sound and has a Blues style that dips into early 1970s, late 1960's electric Blues and earlier pre-1950's acoustic Blues.

Lyrically songs like 'Return To The Saddle' and 'I'm Back' appear to be the usual Blues cliché but if you're aware of Porter's back story (he's recently been fighting cancer) the lyrics take on a real poignancy. When he sings about the usual lucky charms of the Blues, such as his mojo and Johnny the Conqueror root, you sense he's really banking on their luck saving him. 'Morphine Blues' was written when he was high on the drug when having chemotherapy and has a woozy, Psychedelic power.

He balances the songs pretty well between the acoustic numbers and the Rockier tracks with a fair share of instrumentals sprinkled amongst the fourteen tracks. When he does Rock out as on 'I'm Back' and 'Rock Chick' there's a very strong Rolling Stones influence, from the Keith Richard's inspired groove to Porter's slightly Jagger-esque vocal delivery on these tracks.

Elsewhere, Porter has a decent, if unexceptional, Blues voice but he carries a maturity in his delivery that enhances the material. He's not a young firebrand guitarist now; instead he's the older time-worn man telling his hard luck tales of the life of a Bluesman. His playing is impressive, especially his acoustic picking on the likes of 'The Stygian Witch' and 'Spanish Rose', and on the strength of this record, he'd be worth seeing in live setting.

Duncan Jamieson

SERES – 'ENIGMA HUMANO *(Independent)* PROGRESSIVE

Between a hundred thousand and two million people speak the language which LL Zamenhof produced in 1887; sadly, Esperanto is not common. The Euro Zone may have a common currency, but they (and we) cannot give over our language, it defines us, separates us, shows our distance.

Seres, formed in 2005 as an instrumental vehicle, have some great music to offer here, now including vocals in their native language. Should that put us off... no. Could it... yes. Here, it's no issue at all because Seres keep you guessing.

Beginning with a 1980's vibe ('Una Mas'), '30 Segundos' has the temerity to actually Skank but has a Funky bass to offer too, 'De Madrugada' visits the cocktail bar and as last orders are called, a B3 solo swaddles us all in warm memories.

When not knocking us dead, at least it's interesting; 'Ese Instante' calls Jeff Lynne and borrows his sound, failing to be as large as ELO but at least they try and really as the fourteen tracks play out, the lack of quality becomes painfully obvious, Spanish inflected Folkiness leading to a cheesy synth instrumental by way of a groovy guitar and synth/guitar interplay ('Ladron') but this is a small quibble with a well presented digi-pack and the surprising music within.

Native language or not, this is often a treat; if it's a Seres, I can't wait for the next episode.

Steve Swift

SKILLET – 'VITAL SIGNS' *(Atlantic)* MODERN/ALTERNATIVE

After a triumphant tour with Nickelback last year, Skillet realised that they perhaps had more fans in Europe than they thought. Cue a headlining tour taking in four U.K. dates and an exclusive Europe-only album release featuring the best songs – not necessarily the "greatest hits" – from their three Atlantic Records releases. Ownership rights meant that earlier material recorded with Ardent didn't make this album which is a shame as that prevents the inclusion of songs from the excellent 2003 release 'Collide'.

This album is basically for those who essentially first heard Skillet when they opened for Nickelback and those who have maybe started to get interested in the band through one or two songs. Hardcore fans will no doubt have all of Skillet's material from the original releases and as there are no bonus tracks on offer on 'Vital Signs', there will be little of interest here for them. Atlantic has clearly missed a trick here by not including any as it would have surely boosted sales.

If on the other hand you are a newbie to Skillet, then this is a great starting point. There are three songs from latest album 'Rise' including 'Not Gonna Die', three from 'Awake' including the magnificent 'Awake And Alive' and four from the Brian Howes-produced Atlantic debut including John Cooper's favourite song 'Rebirthing'.

STONEWIRE – 'WHEN THE CROW FLIES' *(22:11)* SOUTHERN/COUNTRY/FOLK

Stonewire are a Female-Fronted Blues-based Classic Rock act with a strong smoky Southern Rock flavour and 'When The Crow Flies' is their debut album. It's very impressive too and shows a lot of promise for the future but I think the really intriguing thing about this album is the fact that it's an album full of songs which will kick some major butt live. Having seen Stonewire live, I have firsthand knowledge of what a great live act they are and what an outstanding live vocalist Sky Hunter is. She can recreate what you hear here with consummate ease on the live stage consistently throughout a performance.

It's hard to not focus on front-woman Hunter when talking about these guys, but the fact is she has such an incredible voice which leaves you absolutely astounded, it's hard not to obsess on her talents. She has power and grit and the emotive quality associated with Joni Mitchell whom is the most obvious female Classic Rock singer for me to compare her to. '...Flies' isn't all bombast and power vocals though; Hunter does have the versatility to tone it down and show a subtler side to her voice, like she does on the emotional ballad 'One More Time', which for me is one of the many highlights on the album. She has a vocal style that really invigorates the core of all the songs and really lifts them up and embeds them into your consciousness. Given her obvious natural born vocal gifts it's an absolute crying shame she isn't more recognised; there aren't many vocalists in the public eye who can sing with the amount of passion and power as Hunter.

Guitarist Gareth Annabelle has a dirty Southern swaggering guitar style and he creates some wonderfully infectious guitar riffs that provide a great energy throughout the album. They show influences from a multitude of seventies-era Classic Rock of varying styles with elements of Lynyrd Skynyrd and Led Zeppelin being the most noticeable. There's plenty of groove and Classic Rock swagger but there is an ever present Southern drawl on most the songs.

The groove driven 'Favourite Bitch' (with its anthemic chorus) is sure to become a favourite with listeners and the passionate swagger of 'Don't You' and the energetic 'Vamonos' make them album highlights to look out for.

'When The Crow Flies' is a cracking debut from these intriguing English Rockers and this album should see this talented bunch easily expanding their notoriety in the coming months. If you think bands like Black Stone Cherry are the bee's knees than Stonewire more than deserve your attention and I'm sure you'll enjoy what you hear!

Paul Woodward

All in all an excellent "dip your toe" release for new fans before they inevitably go out and buy the entire back catalogue starting with the bona fide classic 'Comatose'.

Mike Newdeck

SLEARS – 'FAR AWAY FROM GETTING SOMEWHERE' *(Enghardt Media)* HARD ROCK

As humanity continually strives for instant gratification, in everything from food and television to technology, popular music has embodied this mentality since the early days of recorded music. Initially due to the limitations of existing recordable mediums to the days of modern terrestrial radio restricting the length of the music featured, composing songs that were short and succinct was the best way of reaching a larger audience.

Slears uses this exact approach to offer an album largely devoid of filler and 'Far Away From Getting Somewhere' is forty-two minutes of high quality Hard Rock music. The band's potential oozes from every track and despite undergoing numerous line-up changes, the result is clearly a band of significant talent. Although the brevity of the songs sells the band a bit short, leaving the listener with a somewhat incomplete experience, the songs deliver enough to delight.

Things start slightly rocky with the 1'07" instrumental, title track and (no segue) 'Disappear' clocking in at under three minutes; at this point things do not augur well. Fortunately, the album hits its stride once 'Fading' commences and it never looks back.

The high tenor range of Peter Kandlinger's voice never struggles to maintain dominance in the mix. As a matter of fact, his diction is so clear that there is no need for the linear notes to decipher the lyrics.

Highlights include, but are not confined to, 'Reborn', 'Follow Me', 'One Day' and 'Believe'. The momentum generated by this German outfit on 'Far Away From Getting Somewhere' is certain to only improve with subsequent albums. Paying homage to the post-grunge Hard Rock of Nickelback, Sevendust and Hoobastank, Slears delivers a solid one-two punch of highly melodic, Modern Hard Rock.

Brent Rusche

SLEEP OF MONSTERS – 'PRODUCES REASON' *(Svart)* MODERN/ALTERNATIVE

The debut album from Sleep Of Monsters has already been available in Finland for a while. The band is the brainchild of Babylon Whores lead singer Ike Vil who has assembled another set of musicians as an outlet for his darkly Gothic brand of Melodic Rock.

The album starts promisingly with a cool but brief intro ('Holy*Holy*Holy') before the first full song, 'Nihil, Nihil, Nihil', assaults the aural senses and pretty much sets the tone for the rest of the album. There are obvious and immediate comparisons to the likes of HIM, Sisters Of Mercy and The Rasmus whilst touches of Nightwish show themselves during the orchestral arrangements and the use of keyboards.

Each song makes good use of female backing vocals (The Furies) and these provide a nice contrast to Vil whose tone is a little one-dimensional and monotonous to listen to solely. After 'Abomination Street' (very SOM) the middle part of the album tends to drag somewhat and the songs are similarly paced. There are two guitarists in the band line-up, one of whom, Sami Hassinen, acts as the main song-writer alongside Vil. I've no real problem with the material but it would have been nice if there had been more depth to the hooks, for while

they are okay they leave no lasting memory, even after a number of plays.

'Through A Mirror Darkly' has an underlying Eastern musical edge. The grinding riffs and solo lines that weave in and out hint at the mid-album variation that is missing and though it is no 'Gates Of Babylon', it is a personal favourite. The haunting female vocals in 'Cobwebs Of Your Mind' are again a prominent feature of the song structure and demand attention but unfortunately are not dominant enough once Vil begins to sing. Apparently some of the lyrical themes are Vil's interpretations of the works of various obscure German writers, and even Samuel Coleridge, but my literary knowledge does not stretch far enough to be able to pass any kind of opinion on their validity or use.

'Produces Reason' is by no means a bad release but I would have preferred more variation in the pacing of the songs, greater use of female vocals (maybe even a duet) and something more uplifting in atmosphere.

Dave Bott

SOLDIERFIELD – 'CATHARSIS' *(Metalbox)* HEAVY METAL

I've struggled a bit with Soldierfield and don't mind admitting it. However, don't let that put you off reading any further because they have won me over with an album that's full of some great Rock tunes, fine guitar tones and an outstanding vocal performance from Leigh Oates.

Based in the Manchester area, Soldierfield released a five track EP in 2012 and now present 'Catharsis' as their debut album. The album opens with 'The Light' with unforgiving Heavy Metal riffs and a powerful but raw vocal. There is a bit of melody and harmony in the chorus but to the most part it's the crunching guitars and shredding lead break that dominate in similar vein to 'Beautiful Lie' which swiftly follows. 'The Only War' begins to show that Soldierfield are more than just a harsh Metal band with a melodic intro and a real impassioned performance from Oates. The Metal riffs are still there, make no mistake, but within a song that has a lot more to offer.

The assault continues with 'Monochrome' and I am beginning to think that this is very competent, but so far uninspiring Metal overkill. But then in 'Ghosts', Soldierfield delivers a classic combination of subtlety and power that even has a touch of acoustic guitar in the rhythms. 'New Religion' also has its harmonies and changes in pace as the album gets better as each track progresses. Title track 'Catharsis' is an acoustic balled as we head towards the highlight of the album in closing track 'Cut The Ties' which combines power and melody in the guitars with a soaring vocal.

'Catharsis' is most certainly an album that will grow after several plays, not least because it saves the "best 'til last" as the songs grow in quality and depth as the album progresses. The outright Metal onslaught of the first few tracks is strong enough, but at that point I couldn't help wondering how one dimensional the band were. Thankfully Soldierfield proved that first impressions can be very wrong.

'Catharsis' may not be instant hit but I do recommend it as its well worth the effort to discover.

Ian Parry

SPIDERS – 'SHAKE ELECTRIC' *(Spinefarm)* ROCK

Welcome Spiders from Sweden with their sophomore album 'Shake Electric'. This album will certainly take you back to the 1970s; a Rock album with both earthy, Grungy tones and smooth, retro guitar. Ann-Sofie Hoyles gives a strong vocal performance which is beautifully husky and charismatic. It would have been even stronger however, had she stretched the range and style a little more.

'Hard Times' is a good example of her venturing out of her comfort zone a little more, adding more emotion to the single slower song of the album. Openers 'Mad Dog' and 'Shake Electric' introduce some great thumping rhythms, keeping things punchy, but by the fourth track, 'Only Your Skin', the rhythm section feels a little repetitive. At times the album feels like one long song, albeit a fairly good one.

'Bleeding Heart' accentuates the prominent polyphonic texture of Spiders' music, guitarist John Hoyles and bassist Olle Griphammar not only diverging from one another but also going off the beaten track within their own parts too. Album closer 'War Of The World' gives a clear example of this in that they are playing sounds and tones off against each other.

Spiders have made a great statement with this album, bringing something new to the table. The song-writing seems understated though, with room for the same expression and exploration exhibited in the sound itself. Still, there are songs I'll return to for Hoyles's commanding vocals and the overall laid-back retro sound.

Sophie Brownlee

STARSET – 'TRANSMISSIONS' *(Razor And Tie)* MODERN/ALTERNATIVE

'Transmissions' is the curious debut album from the Columbus, Ohio-based band Starset, who appears to be making a bit of a splash Stateside. The band is led by Dustin Bates who, it seems, has some kind of science background. This apparently includes PhD study in electrical engineering, research for the U.S. Air Force and teaching at the International Space University.

This is not incidental information, as according to the press release "Dustin formed Starset after being contacted by an organization called The Starset Society and its President, Dr. Aston Wise" and "asked if he was interested in forming a band to promote the organization's message. At its core, the message is a warning that involves a scientific discovery that is currently being controlled and manipulated by an elite few."

Fact-driven or just a clever and playful concept? Well, both band and Society have websites you can peruse at your leisure to make your own mind up; Tesla, alien intelligence, Kepler, twin earths, Phillip K. Dick, "humanity's highest aspirations and utter ruin". Does it sound like your kind of thing? Either way, it's all very well done and gives those who like a good concept album plenty to get their teeth into.

Musically, the album is something of a surprise and, occasionally, even a delight. One might expect something heavy and Prog-based, but actually 'Transmission' is an unusual blend of AOR accessibility and 'War Of The Worlds' style drama, with smatterings of spacey sounds and occasional voiceovers ensuring that the listener is never taken too far from the science fiction theme.

Both quality and vibe are maintained throughout and the highlights are numerous. 'Down With The Fallen' opens with a kind of tribal rhythm amid the aforementioned spacey sounds, before exploding into a modern sounding track which features a melodic verse, a part-chanted chorus, and (briefly) abrasive "shouty" vocals. Tracks like 'Halo', 'My Demons' (the U.S. hit and lead U.K. single) and 'Carnivore' show off the album's brighter, catchier side with the latter benefitting from a moody and meandering outro. 'Dark On Me' manages to weave a love song into proceedings ("I found in you, what was lost in me, in a world so cold"), while the album ends with a run of increasingly powerful tracks ('The Future Is Now', 'Point Of No Return' and 'Rise And Fall') which up the ante in terms of drama and aggression.

'Transmission', then, is always accessible and occasionally edgy; the live shows, promised in 2015, will certainly be interesting. And if you like a good sci-fi yarn and have patience with the concept, you might like to check out The Starset Society website. Nanu nanu.

Michael Anthony

STEVIE NICKS – '24 KARAT GOLD: SONGS FROM THE VAULT' *(Warner)* ROCK

The last Stevie Nicks solo release was 2011's 'In Your Dreams'. During the creation process of that record, she developed a new working relationship with former Eurythmics main-man Dave Stewart. It seemed that Stewart had reinvigorated the songstress as it was her strongest set of tracks for a long time. The Fleetwood Mac cash cow has taken up the intervening years and consequently it has not been possible to write any fresh material. Of the fifteen songs that make up '24 Karat Gold', thirteen were written between 1969 and 1987, one was written in 1994 and one in 1995. They are brand new recordings, but some were re-worked to become different songs on previous albums whilst others were shelved completely. I'm sure the Nicks anoraks out there could easily shed some light on their origins as no details are given in the accompanying booklet. Many of the musicians who appear are Nicks' regulars, such as Waddy Wachtel, Mike Campbell, Benmont Tench and Lenny Castro, whilst Stewart returns to oversee proceedings from the producer's chair.

It is quite clear listening to the album that many of the songs belong to a different time. They certainly do not follow the path of the material from more recent solo releases and would not have been out of place on 'Bella Donna' thirty-three years ago. Nicks actually sounds in good voice throughout and manages to maintain the quality without resorting to endless ad-libs and passages of a more spoken nature. One or two songs, 'Hard Advice' and 'Carousel' (actually a Vanessa Carlton cover and a favourite of Nicks' mother during her later days) have a distinct Country vibe whilst several others, notably 'Belle Fleur', could originally have been written with FM in mind back in the 1970s. 'Mabel Normand', 'All The Beautiful Worlds' and 'The Dealer' are the most reminiscent of her 1980's output and, if I'm honest, if they were written during that period, should have replaced a number of songs that did actually make the cut on albums from that time. Closing track 'She Loves Him Still' is a Mark Knopfler co-write; a personal and passionate reflection on a love lost and I just can't get past the idea that Lindsey Buckingham could be the subject matter every time I hear the song.

It may have been prudent to have left some songs in the vault but on the whole, this project is a worthwhile exercise. The diehards and completists out there will already be familiar with much of the material on '24 Karat Gold' and there is a possibility that may diminish its appeal. I class myself as a fan and it is good to know that there is still an outlet for the songs not classed as "Mac" worthy, even for an artist at the age of sixty-six (hard to believe).

Dave Bott

SWEET & LYNCH – 'ONLY TO RISE' *(Frontiers)* HARD ROCK

Originally mooted to be under a band name, the "super-group" featuring Stryper front-man Michael Sweet, Dokken/Lynch Mob guitar virtuoso George Lynch, White Lion/Megadeth/Black Label Society bassist James Lomenzo and Billy Idol/Whitesnake drummer Brian Tichy, now has just Sweet & Lynch as the project name. The pair have written the songs and undoubtedly given Frontiers a Stryper/Dokken hybrid, but that doesn't lessen the role of the rhythm section in renewing the understanding they had in Pride & Glory.

The album's style isn't a million miles away from what you would expect from the main protagonists, with Lynch providing the riffs and solos and Sweet moulding them into songs and writing the lyrics. Now I'm sure some of you might have two problems there, but I can assure you that all Lynch's work is old-school Dokken and not in line with some of his recent heavier, down-tuned leanings, and Sweet's lyrics aren't like his work with Stryper – if there are religious themes here then I haven't spotted them. Anything with Sweet's vocals on will undoubtedly have that Stryper feel and his distinct melodic style, but Lynch's guitar sounds are more expansive and the mix works well.

The layered guitars on 'The Wish' certainly have an 'Under Lock And Key' feel, right down to some familiar bits in the solo, but still has that Stryper melody and power. I could go on to say that the ballad 'Me Without You' has hints of 'Alone Again' or that the groovy 'Dying Rose' sounds like Lynch Mob playing a Stryper song, but that's exactly the point of the project.

It's not all familiar territory, 'Love Stays' is less intense and quite a departure for both of them, 'Rescue Me' is cleverly arranged with a pounding rhythm and a tuneful verse, and 'Recover' is pretty heavy with a screaming vocal that's high even by Sweet's standard. 'Strength In Numbers' has big keyboards that take it into Symphonic Metal territory and 'Divine's grinding verse and Beatles-like chorus is interesting, but it's probably the more "normal" Hard Rockers 'Time Will Tell', 'September' and the title track that will be favourites of the duo's long-standing fans.

Over the last few Stryper releases Sweet has proven himself to be pretty handy in the studio, his production here being comparable with the big budget releases of the eighties (bar maybe a slightly flat drum sound). The bottom line is that this is a killer album with some very special songs that will hopefully have some legs and enable this line-up to play live. Sweet & Lynch have made an album that I can't see anyone with an interest being disappointed with, and you really can't ask for better than that.

Phil Ashcroft

TANGO DOWN – 'CHARMING DEVIL' *(Kivel)* — HARD ROCK

Those of you who know me personally, or through Social Media, know that Crompton Towers takes delivery of innumerable albums per week, both old and new (much to the annoyance of Mrs C). However, no matter how hard I try to catch up, then keep up with all things Melodic Rock, there are always bands that remain undiscovered or simply put on the back burner for future investigation and/or purchase – please tell me I'm not alone?! Well, Tango Down has remorsefully been simmering on that back burner since their conception in 2005. Thankfully 'Charming Devil', their fourth offering, actually made it through our threadbare letterbox (thanks Julian) and I must confess I was pleasantly surprised from the word go!!

Maybe the primary reason TD haven't quite made it to the premier league of Melodic Rock is due to the fact that their first three albums all had different vocalists, which can be disconcerting for those looking for some sort of emotional attachment. However, inconsistency appeared to have been dispelled when vocal powerhouse David Reece (Gypsy Rose, Bangalore Choir, Accept) returned for his second successive stint at the microphone (Warning – Inconsistency Alert to follow!) alongside Scott 'Rif' Miller (guitars, backing vocals), Keith 'Bam Bam' Michaels (drums, percussion) and new boy Ronnie Parkes (bass, backing vocals).

From the second the "play" button is pressed it's evident that the music on offer is designed for stadiums; anthemic, intense, but most important of all... melodic. 'Bad Reputation', 'Charming Devil' and 'Tunnel Vision' get the album off to a barnstorming start and having never heard the band before, my first thoughts leaned towards a heavier House Of Lords with Jorn Lande (circa Aeronautics) at the helm. The Lande comparison (and that's no bad thing, right?) is even more in evidence on 'Change My World' and 'New Addiction'.

To be honest, the last time I heard a set of pipes as good as Reece's was when the band of the Royal Scots Dragoon Guards hit the #1 spot in 1972! Whilst the rhythm section of Michaels and Parkes carry each song forward with tribal aplomb, plaudits should also be given to Miller, whose quality riffs and controlled guitar breaks are omnipresent. There are, of course the obligatory ballads, two of them, but 'Too Many Roads' and 'Nothing But Rain' are both carefully crafted and emotive compositions. I do have one selfish, minor gripe though – a lack of tempo variation throughout the opus... oh for a pedal to the metal Rocker!

Inconsistency Alert! Reece has recently announced he's moving to pastures new, so huge vocal chords to fill there; but he leaves behind a legacy that I'm more than happy to highly recommend!

Dave Crompton

STEVIE NICKS – 'BEAUTY AND THE BEAST' *(Iconography)* — ROCK

There have been a host of Stevie Nicks live releases during the last two or three years, mostly unofficial and of varying quality. 'Beauty And The Beast' (the name of a song taken from the 'Wild Heart' release that features here) is a radio broadcast from Cuyahoga Fairgrounds in New York, originally recorded on August 15th in 1986. At the time of the broadcast, she was in the process of touring to promote the 'Rock A Little' album, yet strangely only one song ('Talk To Me') is included in this set. Of the solo material five songs are taken from her debut solo album 'Bella Donna' and two from '…Heart'. We also get two Fleetwood Mac songs (naturally) and a cover of Tom Petty's 'I Need To Know'; a solo set staple to this day.

What is apparent when listening to this release is that the recording has not been "doctored" in the studio at all. That may be a good indication of how official it is as one or two Nicks live releases in the past have clearly been worked on following the actual show. The occasional feedback and missed cues actually add to the attraction and there is certainly evidence of how much the iconic songstress relies on backing vocalists.

Opening track 'Outside The Rain' segues into 'Dreams' nicely and there is a loose feel to proceedings, even though I know longtime live partner-in-crime (guitarist Waddy Wachtel) generally acts as musical director and controls things on stage. The emotional subtleties of '…Beast' and 'Leather And Lace' contrast nicely with the raucous '…Know' and structured 'Talk…', giving Nicks plenty of opportunities to adlib through the dreamy lyrics and haunting melodies. Peter Frampton makes an appearance during 'Stop Draggin' My Heart Around' so my guess would be that he was the support act during the tour. 'How Still My Love' slows things down again before lengthy versions of 'Edge Of Seventeen' and 'Rhiannon' brings the seventy-two minute running time to a close. 'Rhiannon' especially is something of live tour-de-force. The extended intro to the song is a simple piano/vocal duet before the song kicks in properly with the full band.

The appeal of this album may well be determined by just how much you are a fan of Stevie Nicks and in that respect it may be for completists only. Fortunately I am a fan and I have had a pleasurable time listening to 'Beauty And The Beast' constantly for a number of weeks now.

Dave Bott

STUD – 'RUST ON THE ROSE' *(Cranksonic)* — HARD ROCK

The foundations of this Finnish outfit were laid in 1986, but 'Rust On The Rose' is only Stud's second album following hot on the heels of their debut 'Out Of The Darkness' which was released last year. I seem to have an affinity towards bands from Finland, the musicians from that country, regardless of sound and style, have strong senses of melody and even their heavier bands ooze smooth melodies and Stud's brand of Heavy Rock fits right into those assessments.

'Rust...' is full of rambunctious monumental, guitar/riff driven Heavy Rock with strong melodic overtones. There are plenty of anthemic, air-punching choruses combined with powerful guitar riffs to get your head-nodding. Listening through the album, I keep feeling like I should class this album as "Biker Rock" given its song structures, chorus styles and attitude, but it is a hell of a lot smoother and polished than you'd expect from the average petrol-soaked Biker band. Imagine those sort of bands cleaned up and you'll get the vibe these guys have. In fact these guys sound like what AC/DC and UFO would do if they were transformed into an out and out ballsy straight ahead Melodic Rock outfit.

You do have quite a few bar-room "shout it loud" Rockers like 'Raise Your Fist', 'Rock 'N' Roll World' and 'We're Gonna Strike', but there are also a few more obvious Melodic Rock numbers mixed into the bombast. The title track 'Rust On The Rose' is really catchy with its highly melodic guitar riff and a smooth memorable chorus, but for me one of the stand out tracks is 'Promised To Be Mine' which has a sweet infectious chorus.

They do have a unique vibe about them when I try to compare them to other similar acts. I think normally Heavy Rock acts like this tend to have a vocalist who has grit or snarl to their voice. However, Stud vocalist Ari Toivanen has a far silkier and smoother voice and this increases the melodic tone of the album even on those gritty fist-pumping numbers. The guy has a powerful voice that suits the heavy stance of the album but it's full of melody at the same time.

This album on the whole is pretty strong, there is a couple of tunes that just pass you by but in the main 'Rust On The Rose' is a strong collection of songs. It's powerful Heavy Rock with a bombastic Rock drive, lively choruses and a delicious melodic wrapping. If you like it with a heavier edge, but without neglecting melody, this is well worth you checking out!

Paul Woodward

SUPERFECTA – 'PRIMAL INSTINCT' *(Sky Rocket)* — MODERN/ALTERNATIVE

Superfecta are a four-piece from London who formed in 2011. They released their debut EP to much acclaim a year ago and now follow it up with their first album. All four tracks from the EP are included and 'She's A Star' once again powerfully opens proceedings; vocally, it sounds like Soundgarden meets Stone Temple Pilots. 'Emotional Miracle' lends a nod to Alter Bridge with Mark Tremonti style guitar work all over it, courtesy of Danun Todd.

'Inside' begins with an acoustic intro and slowly builds into a dark number with some fine drumming from Junior. A pounding bass line from Max D Pinto opens and continues throughout 'Driven' and it again features some fine drumming from Junior. 'Paradox' is a Rocking number that sounds like Nirvana in places and features a haunting vocal from Andy Urwin, who incidentally drew the cover for the album.

Title track 'Primal Instinct' is up next and is the star of the show clocking in at over nine minutes. The song starts off in a brooding manner and quickly turns into Classic Rock of the highest quality with some fine riffing and powerful output from the rhythm section. The song lets up for a moment with some nice acoustic playing from Todd. The only thing that slightly lets this number down are the gang vocals during the chorus, however on repeated plays you kind of get used to them!

'Fading Light' is a slower paced track that again builds up and ends with another fine guitar solo. 'Fallen Angel' is a fast paced Rocker that never lets up during its four minutes. Pearl Jam have clearly influenced the band on 'To Live Again'; the song is an acoustic-based slower number until Todd lets rip with an amazing solo for the last minute of the song. AC/DC riffing dominates album closer 'Pendulum'.

Overall, the album is a strange brew of Grunge, Classic Rock and Alternative Rock and I'm certain most readers will find something on the album to enjoy. Superfecta will be touring the U.K. to support this release, so do yourself a favour and go and see them!

Az Chaudhry

SUPERFIX – 'SUPERFIX' *(Independent)* — HEAVY METAL

They proudly boast a former touring percussionist and backing singer for Nu Metal pioneers Korn, but L.A.'s Superfix sound nothing like the Bakersfield bunch. Heavily rooted in Melodic Hard Rock with a Southern twang, Superfix's self-titled debut on the surface is a grunting, Grunge-influenced collection but at its heart is a far more straight-shootin' effort.

Tracks like 'Invasion' and 'Mind' may have screams and palm-muted chugging guitars at times, but they appear as nothing more than subterfuge for a strong melody. Although it's never clear if they are trying to bring a heavier side to Melodic Rock or melodies to Heavy Metal; too often it's shoe-horned in either way.

Their obvious heroes, bands like Alice In Chains and the inevitable Korn photosynthesis, carry more convincing tactics of storytelling and building atmospheres rather than simply... we have arrived at a fast bit now. That's not to say this is an inherently bad practise by Superfix and sometimes it works just fine when tracks like 'The Lion's Share', 'Soul Survivor' and 'Run' are taken into account.

The album took over a year to record and underwent several mixes before Superfix decided that the end product had been reached. And this is largely how it sounds; too many cooks. Frank Black perfected the loud/quiet dynamic with Pixies and it's clear just how difficult that was to master when so many other bands struggle with it so much. The push and pull dynamics of the opening tracks work well but when they are repeated numerous times throughout the remaining tracks, it lands itself in hugely predictable and patently dull territory.

Remove all of the confusing and contrasting melodic highs and thunderous heaviness which clumsily crash into one another and there is likely to be a solid album here. As it is, there's more chance of a fix elsewhere.

Dan Bond

SUPERNAL ENDGAME – 'TOUCH THE SKY: VOLUME II' *(10t)* — PROGRESSIVE

Five years ago, Dallas, Texas outfit Supernal Endgame released a rather spectacular Prog album that took the best of Kansas, Genesis, Saga and It Bites and crafted it into 'Touch The Sky Volume I', a release which not only made a strong initial impact but which has, over the years, proved to have serious staying power.

In short, 'Touch The Sky Volume II' is more of the same and equally as captivating. The keyboard work from, well I'd tell you but three people are credited as adding their keys-magic, leads from the front, making the opening pair of 'Supernal One (Immanence & Transcendence)' and 'Different Stage' a mighty and immediate introduction. Tony Banks springs to mind and yet there's a more exuberant feel to the guitar work as it cuts through, while the vocals from Rob Price bring a Peter Gabriel-like husky authority.

Lyrically, as with '...Volume I', there's a similarity in spiritual subject matter to that of, say, Neal Morse, the themes fitting perfectly with the uplifting music. However, where SE have varied things from their previous work is the length of the compositions, four of which hover around the ten minute mark. This extended length really allows the songs room to establish

a variety of attacks and approaches, which the album benefits from hugely. Of the lengthier numbers, 'Eden's Song' takes a 1980's Genesis keyboard motif and marries it to a gritty riff and soaring violin (of which this album has quite a lot, hence the Kansas comparisons), while 'White Flag' leans more heavily towards earlier Genesis to dance sprightly on the back of some exceptional drumming. Add in the shorter delights of 'Swim In Your Ocean' where flute adds a plaintive air and 'Again And Again' which again (sorry) feels like Kansas, although this time combined with Morse.

If I was to pick out one issue, then it's that the otherwise excellent production/mix is a little "bright" for my taste; initial reaction on first listen being to turn down my usual volume setting to reduce the sharpness of sound. However that really is the only complaint, for otherwise 'Touch The Sky: Volume II' reaches for the stars.

Steven Reid

T. CLEMENTE BAND – 'LOST IN TIME' *(Independent)* HARD ROCK

One of the many things I absolutely love about Fireworks magazine and the Fireworks team is they give valuable space to relatively unknown artists! Opening up the musical spectrum to us contributors and music lovers alike as well as giving these deserving artists some international exposure!

This band is just one of those examples. Teddy Clemente may be well known around the San Francisco area but his national and international profile is not quite there; however I think this is all about to change!

'Lost In Time' is about to sky rocket this awesome guitarist and his musical crew into the stratosphere! A driving and daring collection of Hard yet Melodic Rock, this album is going to turn heads. Clemente, himself, is a Progressive guitarist and composer of the highest grade. His arrangements are sterling and with help from producer and multi-instrumentalist Robert Berry, he borders on awe-inspiring!

On this release, he also introduces us to vocalist Amanda Dieck whose talents run parallel to Clemente's. Her voice has an almost limitless depth so she can be harsh and tough when called for, followed by melodious and soulful and then completely breathless – and that can all be in just one song! '...Time' also features long-time musical friends David Lauser on drums and the aforementioned Berry who lent keyboards, bass and guitars to the sessions. You may know Lauser's work from Sammy Hagar whilst Berry is an excellent producer that is sought after in California.

Okay... so the music? The music – ah, yes – get ready for a pulsating Hard Rock journey, one that is peppered with Progressive leanings like you have never quite heard before! From the almost unbelievable string-bending of Clemente to the ballsy rhythms laid down by Lauser and Berry to the super-sonic melodic voice of Dieck, '...Time' absolutely shines on all selections! The talent of the musicians shines through the overall created gems that we hear and each of the fourteen tracks is a killer! Fourteen tracks that mesmerise you! This album is a hard driving effort that is so naturally performed, again at times, it is just unbelievable!

'...Time' is one of those records that will turn the tide of music. It is an album that you will not be quick to forget and one that will call you back for more – time and time again!

Remember the name; 'T. Clemente Band'...remember the album, 'Lost In Time'.

Bruce E.J. Atkinson

THE AMSTERDAM REDLIGHT DISTRICT – 'GONE FOR A WHILE' *(Red Light)* MODERN/ALTERNATIVE

Lyon's The Amsterdam Redlight District don't do things by half on this hundred-mile-an-hour album where hardcore Punk principles vie for attention amidst melodic choruses with the caress of a sledgehammer.

If Refused had a mash-up with Funeral For A Friend and defunct Canuck Pop Punk outfit Autopilot Off then 'Gone For A While' would be the result. There's some full-throated hollering on the ensuing mayhem of 'Time Flies', 'Just Have A Good Time' or the frenetic title track but it's tempered by Elio Sxone's melodic vocals that add commerciality to the Pop-orientated 'Behind Your Sunglasses' or the crunching tongue-in-cheek smirk of 'These Kids That You're Parents Warned You About'.

'Gone For A While' certainly isn't for the faint-hearted with its "bang your head" approach and yet there's something undeniably fantastic about a release where a change of approach adds the modicum of originality required to make it stand out.

Mike Newdeck

THE BIRTHDAY MASSACRE – 'SUPERSTITION' *(Metropolis)* MODERN/ALTERNATIVE

At first glance, The Birthday Massacre wouldn't appear to really be a band that would have much in the way of interest to Fireworks. On Facebook, the band describes themselves as a combination of New Wave, Synthpop and Rock; that's reasonably accurate but there really is a bit more to it than that. Yes, they feature some Dance beats and various electronic additions, but at the heart of their music you will find guitar riffs that are deeper than Bill Gates' pockets and layers of luscious keyboards that provide as much melody as anything else you will find in this fine publication; sitting atop of this audio concoction is the diverse vocals of Chibi.

I hadn't heard of TBM prior to reviewing their previous (fifth) album ('Hide And Seek') back in issue 55. The Canadian Female-Fronted six-piece instantly appealed to my diverse tastes and it's an album that I have revisited many times; naturally I was interested to see what their latest had to offer. Like its forerunner, 'Superstition' consists of ten tracks of thumping synth-based Rock that lasts just under forty minutes.

As with '...Seek', their latest also gets underway with an absolute belter in 'Divide'. There is a solid beat, pinging keys and breathy vocals that flows into a chorus that literally explodes with waves of chugging guitar and delicious synth; I haven't stopped playing this track all month! This is followed by a second cracker in 'Diaries' with its massive synth-fuelled opening and Poppy verse before another infectious chorus with swirling keys, grinding guitar and a bridge that gives me goose bumps every time. Another favourite is the bounding 'Oceania' with its effect-filled guitar, skipping beat and shiny keys that all converges into another uplifting catchy chorus. The last of my regularly re-played numbers is 'Beyond' with its grinding guitar, soaring synth melody and dreamy chorus.

Elsewhere there's the title track which is slower and darker in nature, 'Destroyer' which sees Chibi using scowl-like vocals before a big booming chorus that's all back by John Carpenter-like synth, 'Rain' that features soft vocals, a Poppy beat and keys that sound like rain drops hitting and lastly the closing instrumental, 'Trinity', which would easily work as a soundtrack in any Carpenter film with its slow beat and atmospheric keys.

TRIOSPHERE – 'THE HEART OF THE MATTER' *(AFM)* SYMPHONIC METAL

Ever since their debut album 'Onwards' came out in 2007, I've kept a close eye on the career of Norway's Triosphere. Nothing however could have prepared me for the-light-year-jump ahead in the band's song-writing that has culminated in this new album 'The Heart Of The Matter'. This massive leap in musicality, writing and production sees the band making huge strides up the Symphonic Rock ladder and all of their peers should be taking a very worried look over their shoulders at these new contenders to the Symphonic Metal throne. The band seem to have poured everything that they could have into this new album, upping the ante in every single way and with the added bonus of Ida Haukland's vocals, you know even on the first few plays that you are indeed listening to something special.

The songs and the album have taken almost four (long) years to complete but the way that your fingers itch to hit the replay button (as soon as the album finishes) speaks volumes for the quality of songs that can be found on this disc. Listen to the blitzkrieg opening that is 'My Fortress', 'Steal Away The Light' and 'The Sentinel' and your immediately struck by the sheer force the band has used in their musicianship. The guitars are fierce, forceful and heavy, yet throughout the album have they do have an undeniable Melodic sharpness that keeps you immersed as you listen. Haukland's vocals are also stunning, her performance grabs your attention immediately, as her powerful and emotive delivery draws out all that is good from Triosphere's music.

After this amazing start you soon discover that as good as the first few songs are, the rest of the album is even better and as you continue to listen tracks such as 'Breathless', 'Departure', 'Storyteller', 'Relentless', the hook filled and wonderful 'As I Call' and the Gothic splendour that is 'The Hearts Dominion' all combine to blast the dust and debris from your ears. You are soon transported to a magical world of fantasy and splendour created by one of the best exponents of Symphonic Rock/Metal that I've heard in quite some time.

Praise must also be given to the album's production, which is rich and sumptuous and turns each of the tracks into mini epics. Personally I just hope that Triosphere don't take as long again to make an album because I believe that 'The Heart Of The Matter' is only the start of what this band are capable of and I don't think I could bear the wait; absolutely brilliant!

Ian Johnson

Like its predecessor, 'Superstition' will not be for everyone and it's an acquired taste for sure due to its varied and modern influences. But I have to admit this is one of two albums that I been unable to stop playing repeatedly this issue. This isn't one for traditionalists, but if you also have a similar eclectic taste that ranges from Pop to Hard to Atmospheric Rock, then The Birthday Massacre may also be for you.

Dave Scott

THE FIREFLYS – 'EMBERS OF THE AUTUMN' *(Canadia)* MODERN/ALTERNATIVE

Formed in Runcorn back in 2007, 'Embers Of The Autumn' is the third album from The Fireflys, a collection of soulful, melancholy even, songs combined with some tasty mid-American style Rockers, split down the middle in almost side-A / side-B fashion.

From the opening of 'Unplayed Guitar', the first five songs are largely acoustic driven tunes packed full of emotional tales of love and loss. Although TF are most certainly a band with excellent bass work from Stephen Roberts and restrained, yet totally effective drums from Andrea Packer, it's without doubt the voice and song-writing of Lee Wylding that raises the music to top level. Almost in the singer/song-writer style of a Jack Savoratti or even Ed Sheeran, Wylding's smooth emotional vocals are easy and clear to listen to and in tracks like 'Hummingbird' and 'Julianne' there's a touch of real class about it too.

The second half of the album lifts the pace, 'Cemetery Song' has a rousing, Rocking guitar solo to finish, swiftly followed by 'Paper Plane', a catchy Cars/Billy Joel style romp. 'Der Reise' sees the band in full Alt Rock mode with the heaviest track on offer. By comparison 'Hannah Said' and 'Between The Tide' tone things back down a little - a pair of Southern or Country style Rockers.

The U.K.'s answer to Counting Crows may be a fair comparison – this is an album packed with stirring, emotional storytelling tunes of real quality. My only concern would be that this album was first released fifteen months ago back in August 2013. If it hasn't made an impression by now then is it too late and has 'Autumn Of The Embers' missed the boat this time round.

But if quality and perseverance shine through in the end, hopefully there is more to come and The Fireflys will get there soon enough. And at least at that time they will have a top quality back catalogue to go back and explore.

Ian Parry

THE GERMAN PANZER – 'SEND THEM ALL TO HELL *(Nuclear Blast)* HEAVY METAL

The German Panzer is a classic Teutonic Metal power trio consisting of Accept duo Herman Frank and Stefan Schwarzmann (guitars and drums respectively) as well as Destruction vocalist/bassist Marcel "Schmier" Shirmer; the release of their debut 'Send Them All To Hell' is bound to raise a few eyebrows within the Metal illuminati.

Developing from a conversation between Schwarzmann (now living in Switzerland) and legendary Swiss club 27 owner Norbert Mandel, the band came together surprisingly quickly; their united mission to deliver a spine snapping dose of old-school Heavy Metal befitting of their chosen epithet. Created in the main by Frank and Schmier, the ten songs which make up this rabid riff-fest that is '...Hell' ain't what you'd describe as particularly pretty to look at (or listen to) – indeed, the pink and fluffy brigade will almost certainly dive for safety behind momma's skirts as soon as caustic opener 'Death Knell' kicks in – but then again, Metal never was.

Coming across as a mixture of Accept, U.D.O and Rage with those inimitable Destruction-styled vocals riding on top; their no frills, no compromise brand of gut wrenching Metal will

batter you into submission by the time track three 'Temple Of Doom' sticks its jackbooted foot through your front door! Yet, for all the face melting riffs, intense theatrical posturing and barbed lyrics, there's a tribal quality to The German Panzer that will intrinsically bind and endear them to serious old-school Metal fans ... and yes, that includes me.

Most of the songs are delivered on the gallop; thunderous bass and drum runs underpinning a seemingly endless barrage of acerbic riffs and strafing solos – as such, when they slow it down, as they do with the bellicose 'Why?', the impact is even more pronounced. Schmier's vocals have always been an acquired taste (although the same could certainly be said of Udo Dirkschneider), but the guttural snarls and growls work perfectly within the overall context of the band's overall sound.

It's intense, it's nasty and it kick some serious f%*king ass… just what the doctor ordered as an antidote to stress!

Dave Cockett

THE LONGING – 'BLEED' *(Independent)* MODERN/ALTERNATIVE

The Longing are a Female-Fronted five-piece from L.A. centered around founding member and singer Laura Bradley. In addition to Bradley the band consists of guitarists Yury Anisonyan and James Kloeppel, bassist Michael Wallace and drummer Tom Plumb. All are quoted as being formally trained, seasoned session and touring musicians with numerous high-profile production and engineering credits (though none are actually listed in the bio). The musical style is primarily Gothic with an underlying modern undercurrent and if I had to reference anyone it would probably be Evanescence. The bio references the likes of Stone Sour, Seether, Shinedown and Halestorm, but after a number of spins I'm still struggling to make even the slightest comparison to any of those artists.

I do like 'Bleed' but if I have one criticism it is that the material is rather one-paced and too many songs lack a strong identity, despite their overall appeal. Bradley has a good voice but one gets the impression that she is never really pushing herself. It is pleasant without being commanding and as such just fails in making good songs into really good songs.

If the opening duo of 'Wicked' and 'Bleed' had been injected with more energy they would have impacted much more. The tempo varies very little from track one to track thirteen (track ten 'Winter' aside as this does actually find a higher gear) but it is a sign of the quality that does actually exist that means it never really becomes a burden on the ears.

'Fade' contains a male Rap-like vocal that acts as a nice contrast and works well in the context of the song, whilst the stabbing riffs of 'Lips' offer an almost upbeat take on a more traditional Gothic musical framework. The hooks are generally immediate and it is difficult not to get caught up in the music despite any misgivings I may have outlined earlier.

'Words' is a song that borders on AOR at times during the verse and then the chorus that breaks down into the Gothic style during the bridge. The song also contains one of the few actual guitar solos on 'Bleed' and though it is only brief, it is still welcome. The album's mood is not overly dark but it is not quite uplifting enough to generate a happy feeling. The album comes to a close with a unique interpretation of the well-known standard 'Amazing Grace' but I'm not really sure how well it works.

The Longing seem to have performed in the main in and around California but I'm sure with right exposure they will attract more fans, especially if they can find a fan base in Europe where this kind of music is very popular.

Dave Bott

ROUGHNECK RIOT – 'OUT OF ANGER' *(TNS)* SOUTHERN/COUNTRY/FOLK

A while back I extolled the virtues of a band called Sir Reg, a new voice on the Folk/Punk scene, and I am delighted to add Roughneck Riot to the list of bands that take Folk and Punk, smush them together and have a party with whatever comes out.

Although from Warrington, RR (who have been around since 2005) sound incredibly Irish, slotting into the mould discarded by the likes of Flogging Molly. This is emphasised by the mandolin played by vocalist Matty Humphries which constantly twangs along with the, at times, furious guitar and drums and really makes a difference to the band's overall sound.

The songs are loud, proud and angry, a bit like The Levellers played at double speed with the bass all the way up to eleven. Much like SR, the melodies are immediate and the hooks catchy, but underneath are smart, angry lyrics that can bring an extra dimension of pleasure to the discerning listener.

This sort of music is always best enjoyed live, but 'Out Of Anger' effectively captures the spirit and energy of a band who hopefully will use it to shout their name to anyone who wants to start a revolution and listen to great music at the same time.

Alan Holloway

THE SIDNEY GREEN STREET BAND – 'THE SIDNEY GREEN STREET BAND' *(Independent)* SOUTHERN/COUNTRY/FOLK

Okay, so upon the first listen (and I guess this is because I'm also a drummer) I was immediately gravitated to the beat & rhythm section! I also thought "I know of this drummer" and lo & behold it is none other than Steve Holly! He also happens to be the back beat king for Ian Hunter! So with much dancing to this record (in the privacy of my sound room and with my best dancing partner – Gypsy my dog!), I thought it best I get down to actually writing this review!

So, if you want a good time rollicking band that creates some heavenly straight forward guitar-driven Rock 'n' Roll then look no further than The Sidney Green Street Band! An American quartet of accomplished musicians that simply play their hearts out and have a great time doing it!

With twin guitars from Justin Jordan and Lance Doss plus the aforementioned Holly on drums and four-stringer Paul Page; they collectively lay down eleven infectious Southerly-rooted Rock expressions. Each song is cemented with the whiskey-tinged voice of Doss – playing double duty in this group with his six string exercises. This is straight forward Rock with more than a generous helping of some Southern Blues. Not only does everyone here play from the heart – they write from there as well! Songs full of love, life, ambition and generous servings of humour – The Sidney Green Street Band will make you want to dance the whole night through and even smile a time or two.

As all members of this group are still involved in other projects, I personally hope that these four will continue playing, performing and creating as they have the makings of becoming a musical landmark. Their outside projects are with legends in this industry, and they too can become a legendary band – this debut is a varied, multi-textured collection of some good time Rock 'n' Roll and it shouldn't be any other way!

Bruce E.J. Atkinson

TIN SPIRITS – 'SCORCH' *(Esoteric Antenna)* PROGRESSIVE

The formation of Tin Spirits came about in 2008 when Daniel Steinhardt from TheGigRig (effects foot pedals) invited former XTC and Big Big Train guitarist Dave Gregory to jam with his band (The Hi-Fidels) which included bassist Mark Kilminster and drummer Doug Mussard. They enjoyed it so much they took it a stage further and recorded an album, 'Wired To Earth' that emerged in 2012.

The debut was good but this follow-up is even better, with its combination of 1970's Prog with the Poppier sensibilities of XTC, plus a few nods in the direction of the Modern Prog style making for a very pleasant and interesting listen.

The opening instrumental 'Carnivore' immediately puts me in mind of 'Duke'/'Abacab'-era Genesis thanks to a chugging bass refrain and the chorded guitar motif, both of which are redolent of the band at that time.

'Summer Now' is a wonderful track. It has a BBT vibe with a lovely rolling guitar riff and a delightfully melodic vocal performance. I would go as far as to say this is a beautiful song; it may seem simple, but the best tracks often are. The chorus is fabulous as is the guitar solo. The bridge and second solo inject a different feel before the band loop seamlessly back to the original tumbling pattern.

'Old Hands' opens like a cross between Spock's Beard and The Flower Kings before changing to a vibe not unlike XTC for the verses with the opening refrain returning for the chorus. To mix things up the guitar solo introduces a third phase over a dynamic drum pattern. There is a dodgy, heavy bit that's at odds with the musicality of the rest of the song and album, but it's mercifully brief.

'Binary Man' has a chunky riff, great lyrics and yet more strong melodies; when the pace of the song increases the Prog elements are to the fore. Some of the guitar work makes me think of Alex Lifeson (Rush). 'Little Eyes' is another terrific song with a cascading riff and a glorious chorus. The lengthy solo that draws the song to a close is a masterpiece of construction and tunefulness.

'Wrapped & Tied' has a spiky edge to the riff giving it a modern feel but it's no less tuneful for all of that while 'She Moves Among Us' is an acoustic instrumental prelude to the album's epic closing number 'Garden State'. Once more there are lovely refrains and melodies as it spans various styles and themes. It loses momentum briefly in the middle before the key theme returns in splendid style.

Another fine album in a year of many wonderful releases.

Gary Marshall

TITANIUM BLUE – 'TITANIUM BLUE' *(Independent)* BLUES/SOUL

Ah, the Purdie shuffle, the lazy, cool beat purveyor for loads of acts including Steely Dan. From Bernard Purdie, drummer sublime, that lovely beat at the back of Toto's 'Rosanna'... that's a Purdie shuffle. There's lots of that here, laidback, gentle, happy chappies with lots of charm; there is good and quite good here, nothing awful but nothing that will knock either of your socks off.

This hard touring U.S. band are clearly seasoned but not jaded, pictured as they are behind an aerial aeroplane, this West Coast wonder often calms you with care; often due to the warm, clean guitar and growling organ, which blossoms and edges all out of frame or just hangs around in the background, ready to rear up.

'When I Fall' has all this but isn't afraid to strut too, clicking fingers to an electric piano and 'Better Think Twice' closes the album as if they have nothing else to prove and so have

WHILE HEAVEN WEPT – 'SUSPENDED AT APHELION' *(Nuclear Blast)* PROGRESSIVE

Virginia's While Heaven Wept are celebrating their 25th Anniversary year with the release of their sixth full-length album 'Suspended At Aphelion'. A concept album with only one track that is split into eleven parts (now that's what you call a Prog song) and according to their bio they are a Doom Metal band? So as much as I like Doom Metal, I was worried that maybe this wouldn't be for the readers of Fireworks. However, after many listens to '...Aphelion' I just don't hear this Doominess myself. The album instead reminded me of a great mix of bands like Evergrey, Everon and Cloudscape but in a more laid back way.

The first track 'I: Introspectus' is ushered in with some dream like Spanish acoustic guitar, which soon flows into 'II: Icarus And I' where the guitars of Scott Loose and Tom Phillips join with the atmospheric vocals of Rain Irving and help to set you on a musical Journey that you'll want to return to many, many times. 'III: Ardor' is a heavy guitar piece with riffs galore which then leads to 'IV: Heartburst', a beautiful piano led ballad that once again sees Irving giving his all vocally and that is where a lot of this superb albums strength lies, in his passionate and sincere delivery of the songs. The instrumental 'V: Indifference Turned Paralysis' is a fast paced all out Rocker with some great guitar work and the keyboards of Michelle Schrotz are used as the engine to really power the song along its path. The last few tracks 'VI: The Memory Of Bleeding', 'VII: Souls In Permafrost', 'VIII: Searching The Stars', 'IX: Reminiscence Of Strangers', 'X: Lifelines Lost' and 'XI: Retrospectus' (all combined) only clock in at around thirteen minutes in length but they are still full of dramatic overblown keyboards, guitars and vocals and it's this drama that keeps your attention locked onto what this fine band are doing.

Taken in one sitting, as a single musical suite, you can hear just what WHW were attempting to do on 'Suspended At Aphelion'; that they achieve it is a bonus for the listener. It's my opinion that fans of powerfully played Metal (with a subtle edge and a sense of drama) will get a real kick out of this fine album. Again, just like Scar For Life, I'm off to see if I can raid the piggy bank so I can buy While Heaven Wept's back catalogue.

Ian Johnson

uncorked the plonk and fired up the cigs; Purdie's glory look as you smile gently. A piano is sometimes added with good value and although the vocals are nondescript, they fit.

Elsewhere, in the less convincing part of the album, the Blues holds sway. Rather like a comprehensive book of lists, even if you're interested, at some point you're going to wonder where this is going, realise and wish it wasn't. Authentic sounding Blues after authentic sounding Blues passes by with little excitement, 'Undisputed' may have a downbeat charm but 'Hard Road' certainly is one; bridge, service stations, bridge, cones hotline...

And so this is stuck in the middle. The organ is a thing of beauty and when allowed to do its business, stunning. The West Coast calmness is a calling card. The Bluesy bluster is boring.

Steve Swift

UNITED PROGRESSIVE FRATERNITY – 'FALL IN LOVE WITH THE WORLD' *(InsideOut)* PROGRESSIVE

The United Progressive Fraternity (UPF) was borne from the ashes of Australian Prog band Unitopia who released three studio albums of original material but bowed out in 2012 with a fairly pointless covers album. Core members of the fraternity are ex-Unitopia members Matt Williams (guitars), Dave Hopgood (drums), Tim Irrgang (percussion) and driving force Mark Trueack (vocals) with the idea that other players can come and go, contributing as required or available.

On this album Trueack has marshalled the talents of Jon Anderson (ex-Yes), Guy Manning (Manning, The Tangent), Dan Mash (Maschine, The Tangent) and the ubiquitous Steve Hackett, with Anderson's vocal contribution on 'The Water' being one of the album's highlights.

Unitopia were firmly rooted in the Classic Prog genre and while UPF inhabit the same arena, there are certain more contemporary inflections that separates them neatly from that previous entity; mind you with Trueack's distinctive, sonorous vocals they will always be redolent of Unitopia.

The album's title may be a clue to the underlying theme which is Ecology and taking care of our planet; the lyrics certainly leave you in no doubt but fortunately these are wrapped up with beautifully constructed and melodic music with wonderful themes, refrains and choruses.

In true Prog style the album opens with 'Overture (We Only Have One World)'; it has a Middle Eastern feel (a feature of the album) and a hint of some of Hackett's solo work and sets things up rather nicely. I could imagine it being used at an Olympic Opening Ceremony.

'Choices' carries on the Middle Eastern vibe until the infectious chorus arrives and the tempo and power increases. The track ebbs and flows and moves through several phases including a quiet mid-section where saxophones come to the fore. The sax introduces 'Intersection' on which Trueack excels with his impassioned vocals and another terrific chorus. The contemporary feel I mentioned appears half way through with a frenzied burst of activity before it gets contemplative once again, a pre-cursor to the big finish.

The aforementioned '...Water' puts me in mind of younger Prog bands at the outset while the chorus is superb; 'Don't Look Back – Turn Left' has an initial Steely Dan feel with a pleasing shuffle going on.

The album's epic (its Prog so there has to be one) is the twenty-two minute 'Travelling Man' which ticks most of the Prog boxes including heavier sections that bring the likes of Threshold or Ayreon to mind. The title track's a lovely acoustic ballad (if a tad repetitive) while 'Religion of War' rounds things out in a modern Prog style.

A fine debut full of musical treats.

Gary Marshall

WHITE WIDDOW – 'CROSSFIRE' *(AOR Heaven)* MELODIC ROCK

I was lucky enough to be sent White Widdow's amazing debut to review for these very pages and ever since I've been a fervent admirer of the Antipodean Melodic Rockers centering around the Millis brothers, Jules (vocals) and Xavier (keyboards). Sophomore release 'Serenade' upped the ante considerably and now 'Crossfire' continues that upward trajectory.

Originally earmarked for release at the end of 2013, the recording was delayed following the tragic death of drummer George Kristy and subsequent retirement of bassist Trent Wilson. Recording began early 2014 with new members, bassist Ben Webster and drummer Noel Tenny, who have forged an impressively tight partnership; the latter in particular impressing with his technical ability demonstrated by some intricate rhythm patterns and exquisite fills, accentuated by the enormous drum sound on 'Crossfire'. As with 'Serenade' Grand Design front-man Pelle Saether is responsible for the mix and you can certainly hear his influence on this particular facet of the production.

'Crossfire' also sees a slightly harder approach in places, indeed opener 'Caught In The Crossfire' is constructed around a scything riff and driving rhythm, yet retains the lavish melodies and harmonies WW are known for, with the talented Enzo Almanzi, Australia's answer to Neal Schon, unleashing the first of many spectacular guitar solos. There are also more up-tempo numbers than on the previous two releases, 'Below The Belt', 'Angel' and 'Dreams Don't Die' are all pulsating Hard Rocking tracks, with the latter in particular featuring an amazing chorus that is quite simply to die for.

Elsewhere it's classy Melodic Rock all the way – the sublime 'Fly Me Away' surely destined to become a Rock Radio classic, with 'Too Many Tears', 'Born To Be A Rebel' and 'Never Again' not too far behind. They are all awash with compelling keyboard flourishes and soaring vocal harmonies, while 'Just Another Night' is silky smooth AOR and the beautifully mid-tempo 'Carry The Heartache' is the closest thing to a ballad on the album.

A set of songs that you can listen to over and over again without tiring of, 'Crossfire' is sure to enhance White Widdow's already burgeoning reputation and could be a late contender for one of my albums of the year. If you don't love this album then you're reading the wrong magazine.

Ant Heeks

UNTO US – 'THE HUMAN LANDSCAPE' *(Dark Hill)* PROGRESSIVE

It was five years ago that Huw Lloyd-Jones left Also Eden and indicated he'd return with Unto Us. Given the ensuing gestation period I'd forgotten about this enterprise so was surprised when an album actually emerged. The question is has the wait been worth it? Fortunately, the answer is yes; there's plenty for the fan of Neo-Prog to enjoy.

In true Prog style the album consists of just six tracks with only the short piano segue 'A Human Landscape', at a couple of minutes, clocking in at under eight minutes; the other tracks all being between the eight and eleven minute mark. This permits the songs to develop naturally, to have a nice ebb and flow plus insightful lyrical content. At no stage do any of these tracks outstay their welcome to become either boring or tiresome which is testimony to the skill of both the song-writing and arranging.

Lloyd-Jones (vocals) is joined by the bizarrely named Leopold Blue-Sky on bass, Alex White (keyboards), Tom Ennis (guitars) and former Also Eden drummer Dave Roelofs; the latter has had to step down to be replaced by Rohan Jordan-Shah.

Musically I'd put Unto Us alongside the likes of Pallas, IQ, Riversea and AE (no surprise there); vocally Lloyd-Jones has a rich, sonorous voice that puts me in mind of Alison Moyet, albeit with the phrasing of Alan Reed (ex-Pallas) coming to the fore from time to time.

I've not heard of either White or Ennis previously but both shine throughout the album, with the piano being particularly noteworthy and the other keyboard contributions are none too shabby either. The guitars are nice and varied with Ennis being able to cover a number of styles with incisiveness and clarity; he doesn't get carried away with being flash or over-indulgent. When he does get the chance, his runs and solos are the kind which make you go, "ooo, nice".

The album opener, 'Towers Of Babel', is ushered in on a great drum pattern and then the other instruments are introduced; the guitar theme is a delight as are the synth embellishments. The track builds and really Rocks at certain stages in the process laying down a marker for the rest of the album. 'Boy' has a Pink Floyd acoustic guitar start but moves in a different direction thereafter, the piano is exceptional. Lloyd-Jones gets to sing over a simple keyboard refrain at the outset of 'In A Lifetime' and he's superb as is the rest of a wonderful song.

'Plan B' is a terrific closer that mixes slow delicate sections with those based on heavy guitar, the lengthy instrumental break is rather special.

Gary Marshall

VALENTINE – 'BIZARRO WORLD' *(Valentine)* ROCK

Seven years have passed since his 'Falling Down In Misanthropolis' tome, but Dutch virtuoso Valentine (of the Robby variety) is finally back with his latest offering 'Bizarro World' and it's definitely been worth the wait.

Probably best known for his overblown, bombastic, orchestral arrangements, these have been less in evidence in latter releases and the same is mostly true here. What you do get however is a truly eclectic mix of perfectly crafted songs all with exquisite arrangements from the pen of a genius.

From the pure Pop perfection of the first single 'You're Tearing Me Down', the infectious groove of 'From Dusk Till Dawn' to the Rag-time of 'Deadbeat Boy' and the slightly edgier 'Rockstar' or 'Schizophonicated', the ground this album covers is vast and diverse. There's odd synth grooves, dance beats and notes high enough to have all the local dogs running to your door; heck I swear I heard the kitchen sink in there too and it's all glued together by his trademark harmonies (both vocal and guitar).

Standouts are hard to pick as they are all so good but the more traditional Valentine sound of the title track sets things off in the right direction, whilst the wonderful 'Close The Door' and (perhaps my favourite of all) the anthemic 'Black Rain', with its perfect sing-a-long chorus, are probably the pick of the bunch.

If you're looking for a traditional Classic Rock album, this probably won't be your cup of tea but if you are in the market for the sort of album Queen used to dish out at their peak (think 'Sheer Heart Attack' era) then this is for you. The first pressing sold out in just about a week so make sure you order yours soon and be prepared to be wowed by the 'Bizarro World' of Valentine.

Neil French

VANISH – 'COME TO WITHER' *(Massacre)* POWER METAL

I'll tell you, if I was to tune in to any radio station here in America and hear Cain's Offering, Angra, The 69 Eyes or the band we're about to talk about, I'd probably go into seizures. But I think I can say with a degree of certainty, American radio will probably never play music outside the present status quo. Undoubtedly deserving to be heard is Germany's Vanish and their sophomore offering, 'Come To Wither.'

Incorporating elements of the Progressive, the Melodic and Power Metal, Vanish has come out with one damn fine release. It was Primal Fear vocal-God Ralf Scheepers himself who when hearing Vanish in the studio was so impressed with what he heard that he volunteered his voice for one of the album's tracks.

Picture the power of the fantastic Demons & Wizards, the heavy melodic tunes of Sahg, and the Progressive refrains of Beyond Twilight, and you have Vanish. The music of '…Wither' is loud, heavy, extremely harmonious, guitar driven, with melodic keyboards and pounding drums, with the powerful, almost baritone, voice of Bastian Rose adding his commanding vocal prowess to each track; imagine the deep, growling vocal style of Bjorn Jannson (Tears Of Anger/Ride The Sky/Imaginary) and you have an idea.

The music of '…Wither' comes together nicely within the boundaries of each track, never straying needlessly with superfluous notes. Each song is played passionately, with talent and vigor, and one can tell each band member put their all into each song. The music flows, and the result is a true cohesiveness between the band members. Rose has such a dominating voice that it gives each track even more authority and what is heard is one excellent Metal release that is best heard one way – loud.

Listen to the unbelievable drumming with the machine gun guitar riffs of 'Great Collapse', the soft introduction of 'Curtain Call' when at 1:05 keyboards give way to subtle vocal harmonies that then blows wide open into a true Metal track. Pay attention to the synthesizers of the melodic 'Hope Shall Rise', the explosive (couldn't be played loud enough album highlight) 'Reboot' and 'Hollow' that changes perfectly with various tempo changes, volumes, intensity, and goes from all-out Metal to soft melodies without warning. The closing track, the outstanding seven minute 'The Grand Design' (including Scheepers) features some sensational piano with great lyrics.

Vanish has done everything right here. The best praise I could give this young band is to have their music played on American radio, but sadly that is out of my control. What I can do is plead with Metal fans to make this part of their collection. You won't be disappointed – I promise you.

Franco Cerchiari

VARIOUS ARTISTS – 'RAGNAROK JULETIDE' *(Spinefarm)* POWER METAL

I'd like to open proceedings by stating that I fecking hate Christmas. Before I am castigated for being an utterly miserable bastard, I would like to add that once it was one of my favourite times of the year. But now it arrives earlier each year to such an extent we can't even get through summer before it all bloody starts.

Therefore 'Ragnarok Juletide' wouldn't seem a very apt review for me, but then it's a bit of a different beast when compared to the usual festive tripe. This Finnish all-star project was founded by Erkka Korhonen (Northern Kings) ten years ago under the moniker of 'Raskasta Joulua' ('Heavy Christmas') and each year it's success and popularity has grown; the 2014 tour is set to last over a month and U.K. dates were even discussed.

Musically this is based in the Symphonic Power Metal arena; imagine Northern Kings or Sonata Arctica doing a Christmas Carols album and you will have a firm idea of what this is all about. Considering the project includes Korhonen (guitars, arrangements – NK) and vocalists Tony Kakko (NK, SA), Marco Hietala (NK, Nightwish, Tarot), Elize Ryd (Amaranthe), J.P. Leppaluoto (NK) and Jarkko Ahola (NK), those comparisons are hardly unexpected.

What might come as a surprise is just how good these traditional songs sound when give a Finnish Power Metal make over. Admittedly some work better than others, especially on the vocal front, but there are plenty to highlight. '...Juletide' opens in lively fashion with 'We Celebrate At Christmastime' which has a fun chugging riff and plenty of Power solos/interludes. 'The First Noel' has been transformed with a crunchy progression and double-drum outbursts, whereas 'Little Drummer Boy' is played at the expected pace but built upon a chugging riff with liberally sprinkled, tinkering piano.

'Christmas Is Here' features Ryd's soaring vocals, some well placed double-drum explosions, a chorus designed to be catchy and some excellent soloing. But top mention must go to 'White Christmas' with its twin lead opening and solo, Hietala's roared vocals, pounding drums and chugging progression. You really have never heard it performed like this... pipe, Xmas jumper and a glass of port this isn't. There's also some wonderful Symphonic-like interludes that bring in other songs like a segment of 'O Come All Ye Faithful' in '...Noel' and 'Walking In The Air' during 'Here On The Hay'.

This may not have quite the same life changing effect as Scrooge's three ghosts, but the songs work well in their new form and the performances and technical side are spot on. Whilst this is obviously aimed at Symphonic/Power Metal fans (and they'll love it), the songs are good and accessible enough to appeal to a far wider range.

Dave Scott

VOICES OF DESTINY – 'CRISIS CULT' *(Massacre)* SYMPHONIC METAL

If you dig deep enough, it's amazing just how many Female-Fronted Metal bands are out there, particularly in the Symphonic arena. When you consider the dearth of female Rock and Metal musicians and vocalists even some twenty or so years ago, let alone thirty years ago, it's akin to a baby boom phenomenon.

Voices Of Destiny from Tamm, near Ludwigsburg, Germany, have been around for some ten years now and 'Crisis Cult' is their third full-length release. Their debut 'From The Ashes' in 2010 was critically acclaimed but the follow-up 'Power Dive' in 2012 proved a disappointment, many considering it a lightweight follow-up. Whether or not that hastened the departure of original drummer Erik Seitz just before their Eastern European tour with Epica and Xandria, only the band can say. But after going into the studio to prepare recording this new album, the band decided to continue without clear Soprano vocalist Maike Holzmann, who had sung on the first two albums, for unknown reasons.

With new drummer Klaus Ackermann and a new find in Ada Flechtner on vocals, VOD have once again fired up their sound in a heavier direction. Founding member's guitarist Chris Gutjahr and bassist Jens Hartwig, with original keyboardist and male vocalist Lukas Palme, have found inspiration in Ackermann and have modified the song-writing to suit.

Setting the scene with an atmospheric intro 'Wolfman' blasts out of the speakers with heavy driving riffs and progressive rhythms; the entwined vocals of Flechtner dueting with Palme's growls over the heavy dynamics and the mellifluous melancholic Gothic undercurrent. 'The Easy Prey', again with heavy riffs and male growls, also has a Gothic thematic attached to its Rock dynamic, whilst 'To The Slaughter' is almost made to measure in its simplicity of following what's gone before. The swaying, rhythmic, dynamic riffs allied to the sweet, Gothic, backing music with Flechtner and Palme overriding the aural flavour with their inter-twining syntax.

It takes '21 Heroes' to spice up the assiduous musical assault by creating a melodic ambiance and mood with cool synths that permeate this semi-ballad. Hartwig's steady bass lines are a counterpoint to the juxtaposition of Flechtner and Palme's smooth and harsh vocals.

'At The Edge' is very interesting for the fact it features ex-Xandria vocalist Manuela Kraller dueting with Flechtner, whom Voices Of Destiny had toured with several years ago and no doubt became friends. Following a lilting piano intro with Flechtner's smooth exquisite delivery, synths envelop the female leads and the orchestration of guitar bass and drums create a perfect setting.

This one may take a few listens to bite, but the end result is worth the perseverance.

Carl Buxton

WHISKEY MYERS – 'EARLY MORNING SHAKES' *(Spinefarm)* SOUTHERN/COUNTRY/FOLK

Ever wondered what Led Zeppelin would sound like if they did a Southern Rock album? Probably not... but if you did, you'd find the answer on 'Early Morning Shakes'. It's the Texan quintet's third album, but the first to get an official U.K. release, courtesy of Spinefarm.

Sure, it has all the requirements of a Southern Rock album. If the name doesn't hint enough, one look at the picture on the cover (bushy beards and a Stetson) should be enough, but upon listening, the whiskey-soaked vocals, emotional guitar runs, lyrics abundant with Southern geographical references confirm the genre, while the (sadly un-named) female vocal harmonies are reminiscent of what The Honkettes bring to the Lynyrd Skynyrd party. But there's only so much you can do to push the boundaries of Southern Rock without it becoming something different entirely, so cleverly infusing their sound with some blatantly obvious Zeppelin influences sets Whiskey Myers apart from their Southern counterparts.

The rhythmic stomp and harmonica of the opening title-track is quite evocative as a track from 'Four Symbols' (but rhyming 'When The Levee Breaks' with 'Early Morning Shakes' in the song is lyrical genius), then follow up 'Hard Row To Hoe' brazenly steals the riff from 'Heartbreaker'. The slide guitar riff and stuttering rhythm of 'Home', the Funky movements of 'Headstone' and 'Where The Sun Don't Shine' and the Blues/Funk hybrid of 'Wild Baby Shake Me' also have a cowboy boot firmly planted in Zeppelin's legacy. It's a combination that works perfectly within the parameters of the Southern genre.

However, it's not all Zeppelin-induced rifferama, 'Dogwood' and 'Shelter From The Rain' effortlessly blend Southern with Country in the style that Blackberry Smoke do so well, complete with the cover of David Allan Coe's 'Need A Little Time Off For Bad Behaviour', but in all honesty it's the slower numbers towards the end of the record that are the true standouts for me, 'Reckoning' is just about as perfect a rousing Southern ballad as you can get, 'Lightning' is slow, sprawling Blues, while the epic album closer 'Colloquy' is the album's nod to the masters Skynyrd; a serene acoustic/piano beginning with subtle strings that gradually builds, complete with beautiful harmony guitars at the core and gorgeous solo to take the song to its conclusion, with a stunningly passionate vocal from Cody Cannon.

Spinefarm could have snapped Whiskey Myers up in a bid to attempt to replicate Blackberry Smoke's recent successes, a wise choice indeed. Not only is it a worthy addition to any Southern fan's collection, it will also neatly fill a gap until that next BS album comes along…

Ant Heeks

VERAS – 'NEVER GIVE UP' *(Z Records)* MELODIC ROCK

Danny Veras, hailing from Spain, possesses an impressive pair of pipes. Having sung in U.S. band 7 Months, he has created a mammoth album with help from various luminaries; those being Paul Sabu (Sabu, Only Child), Eric Ragno (White Sister) plus Thorsten Koehne and Pete Newdeck from Eden's Curse.

As a result, the sound is big and classic with Ragno's keyboard very up in the mix, very strong backing vocals and a breathy but powerful Bon Jovi-esque performance from Veras. As for the songs, all bases are covered – heartfelt verses, giant choruses and giant guitar solos. To sum it up, this is as close to Melodic Rock nirvana that you could expect on a cold December weekend.

Opening track 'Hellrider' covers the lone wolf story and starts the album off in the right mode with a catchy solo full of punchy keyboard stabs and a solid beat throughout. Things notch up a gear with the anthem entitled 'Road Runner' which takes you back to the 1980s Hair Metal heyday with guitars out of control and lots of sonic layers. 'Back In Town' is a big song; a power ballad with an extra splash of a solid Rock guitar solo and an over the top production. Other notable songs are the haunting ballad and title track 'Never Give Up' and the closer 'T.V. Scream' with its unusual orchestral chorus on top of a Rocking pre-chorus (plus an awesomely fast guitar solo by Koehne).

Although clearly a team effort by this talented set of musicians, this album succeeds very much in showcasing the vocal talents of Danny Veras. This is a genuine Melodic Rock album full of the unashamed clichés of the genre; an album very much for the Fireworks demographic.

Rob McKenzie

WICKED SENSATION – 'ADRENALINE RUSH' *(AOR Heaven)* HARD ROCK

Germany's Wicked Sensation have been around since the tail end of the 1990s, and to date they had put out three studio albums filled with classy Melodic Hard Rock. New release 'Adrenaline Rush' is number four and it's a slight departure in sound for them.

Gone is the more European sound and in its place a more American Hard Rock style of writing and playing. This might however be down to just one man, the band's new (temporary, see interview) vocalist, Bangalore Choir's David Reece. Reece, as you all know, has been in constant demand since BC reformed and until recently he was singing for U.S. Rockers Tango Down. So when it was announced a couple of months ago that Reece had left TD and joined WS, I was more than a little surprised because his work with TD was excellent. Thankfully, I can tell you that what he's done on the new '...Rush' album from WS is even better and I love this new sound the band have taken with their songs.

The music itself is a molten melting pot of Hard/Melodic Rock with an, at times, Metal edge, but what never goes away as you listen to the songs is the amount of melodies the band have used thorough out the album. They are ingrained in every track and seep out as each and every one is played (which is always a good thing). Just give a listen to 'Misery' with its catchy riff or 'No More Lies' and I defy you not to look down and find your foot subconsciously tapping away to the music. Then there's 'Blue Painted Sky' and 'Angel In Black', songs that almost out-Autograph Autograph (if you know what I mean?). Both have massive melodic hooks and the guitar work of WS's main protagonist Michael Klien and his guitar partner Sang Vong is stunning and memorable. The semi-ballad 'Living On My Madness' has that wonderful Reece rasp and the band are on inspired form as they accompany him. To end, we get a stunning acoustic ballad, entitled 'This Time', where Reece and the band show a whole different side to their musical natures. Plaintive, passionate and captivating describes this song and it's one of the album highlights, even though there's not an electric guitar in sight.

This album should see the band going from the minor to the major leagues of Melodic Rock because Wicked Sensation have really upped their game on 'Adrenaline

Rush'. The song-writing has been taken to another level, way above what they did before, and with the addition of Reece they now have all the tools to go a long way. Well worth your hard earned pennies.

Ian Johnson

WILD ROSE – 'HIT 'N' RUN' *(AOR Blvd)* MELODIC ROCK

The majority of AOR/Melodic Rock albums released recently are a collective proof that the proverbial "he who laughs last, laughs longest" is the final say in the argument about the ever-going "Grunge versus 1980's Rock" debate; the former being dead and gone, the latter of the two rival genres still producing dozens, if not hundreds, of notable releases each year. One such release is the third album 'Hit 'N' Run' by the Greek band Wild Rose, whose music simply screams the 1980's catchy Melodic Rock straight into the face of yours.

For the first seconds of the opening track 'Through The Night' you may start to wonder if it's still 2014 on the clock – from the keyboard-driven melody to the irresistible hook line; it's evident that WR haven't wasted their words while proclaiming their newly recorded material to be "pure AOR sound". The next few songs are the charming, mid-tempo 'I'll Be There' followed by the equally melodic 'Stay'. 'Without Your Love' is a grandiose ballad moment, a worthy representative of something this genre simply couldn't do without, while the more dynamic 'Another Day' and 'Can't Wait On Love' both gravitate towards slightly heavier spheres of Pomp Rock. 'Give In To Me' features some grinding instrumental interludes and a surprisingly heavy solo, preceding 'Together', which is a slower song embellished with fantastic vocal harmonies and tasteful, nifty guitar playing. Another offering with lovely melodies are that of 'Don't Walk Away' and the sugary 'All For Love', both fabulous AOR pieces. The final track 'I Want Your Love' is as strong as the rest of the material, all the key ingredients of the perfect Melodic Rock mixture blended together.

Wild Rose's 'Hit 'N' Run' simply has it all. With its blistering guitars swathed in shiny keyboards, huge infectious choruses and perfect vocal harmonies (plus, perhaps, some visual yet clichéd treats for the male part of the audience as far as the cover artwork is concerned), it's the perfect AOR album. If released twenty-five years earlier, this Greece-based quintet could have competed with the likes of Signal, Blue Tears or Da Vinci; released in 2014 is it nevertheless a gem worth of highest recommendation.

Alexandra Mrozowska

WILL WALLNER & VIVIEN VAIN – 'THE BATTLE OF CLYST HEATH' *(Wormholedeath)* HARD ROCK

With the second album in their discography, there has been some changes in the formula pursued by the British/Croatian duo of the guitarist Will Wallner and the singer Vivien Vain. Instead of a star-studded recording line-up, they chose to limit the guest participations to only a few but kept the standards pretty high with the likes of Carmine Appice, his brother Vinny, Tony Franklin and Don Airey coming on board. The majority of the music was performed by them alongside the regular rhythm section comprised of drummer Giovanni Durst and bassist Bjorn Englen (DIO Disciples, ex-Yngwie Malmsteen). In spite of all those modulations, their influences reminded more or less the same music-wise and that's why their sophomore effort 'The Battle Of Clyst Heath' is neither different, nor worse than their debut album.

The synth-laden intro to the opening track takes you right back to the 1980s era – as soon as you recognize it to be a guitar rendition of the theme song to 1982 classic 'Blade Runner'. It's a mighty instrumental piece with a distinctively Neo Classical vibe to it; a very good start. 'The Wars Of The Roses', with its historical background and monumental, marching sound embroidered with the slightly Folk-ish flavours, gravitates towards the style eagerly utilized by Gary Moore in his mid-eighties "Rock" phase. Pulsating rhythm section work drives a feisty slice of Progressive-infused Rock entitled 'Visions Of Home'. Its follow-ups 'Eye Of The Storm' and 'Black Moon' continue in the same manner, the former embroidered with particularly rich lead guitar work and the latter featuring a splendid guest participation of Blue Murder (now Rated X)'s rhythm section Carmine Appice and Tony Franklin. 'You Won't Take Me Alive' electrifies with its raw groove and expressive vocals, somewhat contrasted with the monumental, epic vibe of the title track. This one's next-to-last on the album, preceding the final song – Wallner's interpretation of Gary Moore's classic 'The Loner' (featuring Moore's former band mates Airey, Neil Murray and Vinny Appice as guests).

'The Battle Of Clyst Heath' is a well-crafted, sublime piece of music, embedded in Classic Hard Rock aesthetics with noticeable influences of Progressive Rock, Folk Rock and Blues. It portrays the duo of Wallner and Vain bravely continuing the legacy their great predecessors left them with, drawing inspirations from the likes of Rainbow, Thin Lizzy, Deep Purple and Gary Moore. Still, it's more of an appropriate vehicle for expression for them than a rip-off of the old patterns, and there's also this feisty, expressive element in the music that nevertheless keeps it fresh and unique. A very good album and the one worth being checked out.

Alexandra Mrozowska

ZERO ZERO – 'HEROES LIVE FOREVER'
TOKYO – 'LISTEN TO YOUR HEARTBEAT' *(Steelheart Memories)* AOR

The latest two releases in the 'Lost U.K. Jewels – Collectors Series' are a bit of a mixed bag; one is a genuine contender who should have gone on to bigger and better things, the other were a good live band whose recordings I'd never heard before, but hearing them now I understand why maybe they didn't.

Number seven in the series are Glasgow legends Zero Zero, formed in the mid-eighties by ex-China White/Strangeways singer Stevie Doherty, who along with guitarist John MacMillan, bassist Andy McCafferty and drummer Joe James, recorded a four-track demo in 1986 that should have won them a major record deal. Classy, guitar-based AOR was the order of the day with 'Heroes Last Forever' being a perfect example, whilst 'Forget About Love' and 'Heart And Soul' were other superb melodic tunes that highlighted Doherty's Strangeways heritage and 'Love And Run' hinted at things to come with its huge, "chanty" chorus.

The next five tracks come from a whopping seven years later, by which time they'd replaced James with Paul McManus and heavied up their sound, and whilst the AOR purists were probably disappointed, four of the five tracks work really well with Doherty's raunchier vocal style and the louder guitar, bass and drum attack. Tunes like 'Rock Me (Rock All Night)', the wonderful 'Lovers And Losers', the dynamic 'Nothin' Left To Lose' and the Bluesier Thunder/Skin direction of 'Take The Hurt' really do stand up well today, although in 1993 they were probably at least a year too late. Amazingly the last two tracks on this disc were recorded this year by the same line-up, and as pleasant, catchy and well-written as these Pop Rock tunes are, they sound a bit thin after the previous demo and there's no sign of the natural grit in Doherty's voice that his work with The Sensational Alex Harvey Band a few years ago suggests he still has. Even so, the ZZ demos have been long overdue a proper release and this is among the best the label has put out thus far.

Disc number eight in the series is by eighties Pompsters Tokyo, who emanated from the North-West of England and recorded several demos in the years before winning a 1988 "Battle Of The Bands" contest; the prize of which was to record a three-track EP. Led by singer Mike Dyer, one of the main problems for Tokyo was the revolving door of musicians around him, and whilst a lot of the songs here have a decent sound and the band were good musicians, the songs themselves lack the sparkle that would take them to the next level.

The three EP tracks are the best; 'Listen To Your Heartbeat' and 'Satisfaction Guaranteed' in particular being strong upbeat AOR of the time with nice guitar parts, Magnum-like keys and Dyer's distinctive vocals. Two tracks from 1989 show them going in a Rockier direction, 'Great White' is faster and heavier than anything else on show and 'Five Knuckle Shuffle' has more of a Van Halen/Dave Lee Roth slant to it, particularly on the vocals. 'Leave Me Alone' is from 1984 and is dated by the synth sounds, 'True Justice' and 'Black Jack' are a cross between NWOBHM and Pomp, and the 1986 tracks 'Hide And Seek' and 'The Losers' carry Dyer's Magnum-influences too heavily and are spoiled by the less than convincing vocals. The crunchy sound quality of the live 'Jailbait' shows what a tight live band they were and is actually one of the better songs, but on the whole the song-writing doesn't live up to the standard on their excellent EP and the band would call it a day before Grunge would have wiped them out anyway. On the evidence of these two releases I can heartily recommend the Zero Zero but would advise caution with the Tokyo disc.

Phil Ashcroft

Stairway
First Class Melodic Hard Rock somewhere between SARACEN, MAGNUM and PRAYING MANTIS, - Metal Page.de
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RE-ISSUES

BARON ROJO – 'VOLUMEN BRUTAL', 'METALMORFOSIS' *(Cherry Red)* HEAVY METAL

It's clearly inaccurate to describe Baron Rojo as a NWOBHM band – being Spanish – but their style, influences and popularity are intrinsically linked to that movement. In the early 1980s, album sales in the millions lead to some huge live performances including the Reading Festival alongside Iron Maiden, Twisted Sister and many others.

This pair of re-issues from the Cherry Red label are probably the two most successful – two chunks of pure Metal before changes in line-up and some experimenting with their sound saw interest and sales begin to slide. Driven by the twin guitars of brothers Armando and Carlos de Castro, the band produced a mix of Classic Rock and Heavy Metal, ably supported by rhythm section of Jose Luiz Campuzano, bass and Hermes Calabria on drums.

'Volumen Brutal' ('Brutal Volume') was released in two versions – Spanish and English vocals with Bruce Dickinson being credited with assisting the translation and vocal phrasing with the aim of making the album more acceptable than the Spanish only debut; it's a move that proved worthwhile with over two million copies sold worldwide. This release is the original Spanish only, not that it should detract in any way from the music on offer

'Incomunicacion' ('Incommunication') starts things off with some classic Metal riffing from the de Castro brothers with Carlos also handling vocals and a killer lead break. 'Los Rockeros Van Al Infierno' ('Rockers Go To Hell') is more mid-paced with the vocal duties being shared around and Campuzano proves to be equally adept. But like the full-on Metal pace of the pounding rhythms of 'Las Flores Del Mar' ('The Flowers Of The Sea'), every song is packed full of gritty attitude and power making the understanding of the vocal (to most of us) irrelevant. There's little let up all the way through until the finale of 'El Baron Vuela Sobre Inglaterra' (The Baron Flies Over England') reminds us of the type of instrumental that Maiden produced in their own early days.

1983's 'Metalmorfosis' ('Metalmorphosis') was a fine follow-up, although a little more melody and a little less Metal than its predecessor, lacking quite the same intense consistency. 'Siempre Estas Alli' (You're Always There') is a heavy ballad and 'Hiroshima' a near seven minute epic tale. You can see that the band are trying to develop their writing with longer, more ambitious songs to good effect, but at the same time that spark of magic that got them noticed was beginning to slip. 'Metalmorfosis' remains a solid album, but not special enough to really stand out above the plethora of bands that had emerged by that time.

Nevertheless, this pair make a fine couple of re-issues, packed with strong tunes and backed up with comprehensive notes and interviews in each package. Ultimately the language issue certainly contributed to BR's decline with fewer fans likely to be attracted to the band. But these early albums celebrate their own enthusiasm and the huge influence and inspiration they provided to Spanish Metal and indeed the Spanish speaking areas of South America.

If you are not familiar with Baron Rojo, ignore any concerns and just enjoy a classic throwback to the 1980s and remember that with figures in the millions, these albums are good enough to have achieved the sort of sales that most bands today would kill for.

Ian Parry

BATTLEAXE – 'POWER FROM THE UNIVERSE' *(SteamhammerlSPV)* HEAVY METAL

Along with Alan Shearer, Newcastle Brown Ale and Venom, Sunderland's Battleaxe are one of the finest exports the North East of England has given the world. But not that many people know this.

Bursting onto the Heavy Metal scene in the early 1980s, Battleaxe made Metalhead ears prick up with their scorching debut album – with added notoriety thanks to a now infamous album cover – and a quickly followed-up second album. Decades in Heavy Metal Hell followed until album re-issues sparked an unlikely comeback.

After the re-release of 1983 NWOBHM classic 'Burn This Town', the brand new album 'Heavy Metal Sanctuary' and a storming turn at Bloodstock Open Air 2014, the Battleaxe resurgence is in full flow.

Thirty years on from its original release (and nine years since its first re-issue) Battleaxe's second album 'Power From The Universe', complete with four bonus tracks, joins the updated Heavy Metal canon that spills the weak pint of lesser bands.

The track titles alone are enough to get blood pumping and heads banging; 'Chopper Attack', 'Metal Rock' and 'Licence To Rock' make up a hat-trick of ungodly racket of top class Heavy Metal – and that's just the first three tracks! Joining them are the likes of 'Shout It Out', 'Over The Top' and 'Killer Woman'. Battleaxe are loud and proud, thanks to a throaty vocal, searing guitars and an irresistibly pounding Rock rhythm.

Coming so quickly after their debut it's no surprise that the rich vein of form was still in full flow as the steady trio of Dave King (vocals), Steve Hardy (guitar) and Brian Smith (bass) locked in their groove adding to NWOBHM's pedigree. 'Power From The Universe' is maybe not the classic that '...Town' is, but it's certainly up there with the best.

Battleaxe are 100% proof that you can't a good band down. More power!

Dan Bond

CLOVEN HOOF – 'THE OPENING RITUAL' *(Metal Nation)* HEAVY METAL

The Occult-inspired NWOBHM act Cloven Hoof are considered local Metal legends in my neck of the woods even though they never attained the cult status of Diamond Head or International stardom of Judas Priest (their fellow Black Country NWOBHM bands of the late seventies and early eighties). A lot of this was down to a constantly shifting band line-up throughout their existence as well as a whole load of bad luck tripping them up before that break came, but they are still thought of fondly locally. The current line-up features Joe Whelan who got a few moments on TV appearing positively twice on X-Factor in recent years and the band are still recording and playing live.

This release though is a re-issue of their debut EP 'The Opening Ritual' with a few bonus tracks and a live recording to bulk up things up to a full album release. Sound wise they have a very typical NWOBHM vibe and song-writing style and structure. They echo along similar lines to Iron Maiden and Black Country brethren Priest. This collection of songs is very of its time and you can easily imagine spotty denim-clad teenagers in the early eighties swirling their greasy hair around to the heaviest music ever known – although by today's standards it may seem very tame but regardless, that epic, bombastic, fast and heavy sound eponymous with the NWOBHM movement is here in abundance.

I wouldn't go nuts about these songs but you can hear the promise the band showed and why they built a buzz in the media and a solid fan base foundation with its release. For me though, this collection of songs lacks that something… that little bit of magic which the likes of Maiden had at the time. They have some Progressive song arrangements which means, whilst tapping into the epic nature many similar genre bands were doing at the time, some songs just go off at a tangent and leave me disinterested. There is some nice variety in their song-writing with 'Stormrider' and 'Road Of Eagles' roaring along like early Maiden and more Rock 'n' Roll structured vibe of 'Back In The U.S.A.' and 'The Way It Goes' comparable to Priest and Saxon.

I think one of the stand-out songs is the live track 'Nightstalker' which oddly has the best production sound; the original EP's production was very much of its time and by today's standards leaves a lot to be desired. 'The Opening Ritual' is more of a curiosity piece than a "must rush out and purchase" item but if you're a fan of early Maiden and Priest, then this will be right up your alley.

Paul Woodward

FERAL SUN – 'EVACUATE' *(Independent)* MODERN/ALTERNATIVE

With something of a renaissance going on with British Rock in general, London's Feral Sun felt the time was right to re-release their debut album in more favourable conditions. Quiet right too, as clearly 'Evacuate' deserves a second coming and further promotion such is its quality.

Ploughing the same furrow as bands like early-era Stone Sour or Alter Bridge in

BRYAN ADAMS – 'RECKLESS: 30th ANNIVERSARY DELUXE EDITION' *(Polydor)* ROCK

Despite being a long time Bryan Adams fan, I decided not to allocate his new album to myself given other team members would likely have better knowledge of the original material. So it was a joyful surprise when the re-issue (two-disc version, there is a four-disc as well) of his seminal 'Reckless' album arrived shortly after. For perspective's sake, this was the first album I ever purchased; I bought a double cassette in my early teens (one half being 'Cuts Like A Knife', the other 'Reckless') and so began my lifelong appreciation. That said, it has waned in the last decade as my tastes have shifted.

I don't suppose I need to write much on the original album itself given the majority of the planet knows at least a couple of 'Reckless' songs; hell, single-celled life forms on Neptune could probably name at least one track. I hadn't listened to 'Reckless' in quite some time but having now returned to it... I have been reminded what an absolute fecking monster it is. It doesn't hurt that it starts with one of my all-time Adams favourites in 'One Night Love Affair', but as you listen the awesome songs just keep pouring out; 'Heaven', 'Kids Wanna Rock', 'It's Only Love' and of course those two songs... those two Goliaths... 'Run To You' and 'Summer Of 69'.

In addition to the ten original tracks, the first disc also includes seven "bonus" tracks. 'Let Me Down Easy' is a middle of the road Rocker with a light strummed verse and catchy chorus that was originally written by Adams and Jim Vallance for Stevie Nicks, but it ended up being recorded by Roger Daltery. 'Teacher, Teacher' is a punchy number with a quick fire chorus and was recorded by .38 Special. 'The Boys Night Out' is an anthemic track that ploughs a similar lyrically furrow to 'House Arrest' or 'Kids...' but not as raucous musically. There is a slightly sleazy and grubby sounding guitar to 'Draw The Line' whilst 'Play To Win' has a solid groove to it. The last two offerings are the best; 'Too Hot To Handle' is a guitar driven Rocker with an infectious riff whilst 'Reckless' is a slower paced song with some scorching lead guitar. Overall they are good tracks, if a little raw, but only the latter two get anywhere near the level of the material that eventually made the album.

I have to admit it was the second disc that really had my interest. It is a recording of a concert at the Hammersmith Odeon for BBC Radio 1 on 20th April 1985. The performance features fifteen tracks including seven from 'Reckless' itself. I was disappointed to see that '...Affair' was missing but overjoyed to see live rarities 'Remember' (from his self-titled debut) and the always welcome 'Lonely Nights' and 'Tonight' (from his second album) with the remainder coming from '...Knife'. The performance recording has a crisp finish with each member audible in the mix, although the crowd are not a vociferous as I have experienced personally; given he was only just breaking big, this is understandable. As a long time fan, I enjoyed this live disc even if it wasn't the liveliest performances of these classic songs.

The nicely package gate-fold release is rounded out by a nice booklet with lyrics for all seventeen songs and some informative notes from Alexis Petridis; for example did you know that 'Run...' was original written for Blue Oyster Cult?

Overall, this is a superb re-issue of a stunning album. I already own two versions but I would happily purchase this edition as well. If you are in the same boat, I would suggest you still invest in a copy and if you don't, then this is a must buy without doubt. If you also haven't played this (in a while?), put it on and find out (remind yourself) just how good one of the greatest ever Rock albums actually is.

Dave Scott

the guitar department, it's left to the rasping vocals of Mick Burns, the ripping guitar solos and the distortion to give FS a British edge. The galloping title track or the superb 'Falling' will no doubt cause a few aching necks when the band take to the road early next year and yet FS contrast the Modern Metal mayhem with a skillful subtlety on the power ballad 'Breath' or the chunky Nirvana-tinged 'People Are Dying'.

With a pin sharp production and enough melody to appeal to the mainstream, 'Evacuate' should see the profile of Feral Sun rise during 2015 and is just further evidence, if any were needed, that Britain does indeed produce first-class Hard Rock bands.

Mike Newdeck

GIRLSCHOOL – 'THE BRONZE YEARS' *(Lemon/Cherry Red)*, 'RUNNING WILD' *(HNE/Cherry Red)* — HARD ROCK

'The Bronze Years' brings together the first four Girlschool albums, which originally saw the light of day between 1980 and 1983; the band arriving at the perfect time to ride the NWOBHM wave that heralded the resurgence of Heavy Rock in the U.K. 'Demolition' was the first album out of the blocks, finding the foursome of Kim McAuliffe (vocals/guitar), Kelly Johnson (vocals/lead guitar), Enid Williams (bass) and Denise Dufort (drums) perfectly combining the rougher end of NWOBHM to a Punky edge. With hindsight 'Demolition' may sound a little simple, repetitive choruses married to chunky guitars and yet the sweaty force with which it is delivered makes it hard not to fall in love with this album all over again. Opener 'Demolition Boys' knocks you over in its eagerness to excite whilst 'Not For Sale' keeps the pedal firmly on the gas. The gals liked a cover version and on this debut effort it was 'Race With The Devil' (originally by The Gun) which by scraping the Top 50 helped the album it came from to the lofty position of #28 in the charts. However to sample the best this enduring album contains, try a slice of the pulsating 'Take It All Away' or Motorhead-lite of 'Emergency'. Unfortunately, as with the other three discs in this excellently presented clam-shell box, the discs themselves don't all hold the plethora of bonus cuts the 2004/05 Castle/Sanctuary re-releases did, with only the b-side 'Furniture Fire' adding to the ten album cuts on 'Demolition'.

A year later and 'Hit And Run', with its striking cover of four girls in Rocker's leathers next to a beautiful blue Buick Riviera, found Girlschool at the peak of their powers. Serious time spent on the road, some of which had found Motorhead's Lemmy Kilmister taking the band under his wing, had tightened the performances and sharpened the song-writing. Impressed with the energetic sound producer Vic Maile had given 'Demolition', he was once again behind the desk as the faultless eleven song set, where the title track booted a ZZ Top groove into orbit (there's also a superb cover of the Top's 'Tush'), 'C'mon Let's Go' irresistibly merged the drum thumping of Kilmister and Co. to a Saxon-esque riff and the bubble gum smack of 'Yeah Right' helped raise '...Run' to an amazing #5 in the album charts. This time five bonus cuts are added, the most notable being the Headgirl collaboration with Motorhead, 'Please Don't Touch' with the Johnny Kidd & The Pirates cover being probably the song Girlschool are best remembered for. A cover of the Motorhead classic 'Bomber' is stunning while b-side 'Tonight' is as good as anything on the album itself. 1981 was a seminal time in British Metal, but '...Run' stands shoulder to shoulder with the best releases from those days.

In terms of chart success Girlschool had peaked, 'Screaming Blue Murder' reaching a respectable #27 in the album charts. However more notable was a change of producer and bass player, Williams ousted from the band to be replaced by the Kilmister recommended Gil Weston. Producing 'Screaming…' was Nigel Gray (The Police, Siouxsie & The Banshees), he and the band adding a little more sophistication to the "heads down and Rock" attitude of before. Fans at the time were resistant and yet with hindsight the throb of 'Take It From Me' hits hard while 'Wildlife' and its choppy riff is an interesting departure. However, while the slicker Rock of the album's title cut was perfect for U.S. radio (in a very good way), the same can't be said for the husky vocals and tribal rhythms of 'Flesh & Blood' which closes the album in confused manner. One bonus cut this time, the b-side 'Don't Stop', which is a bristling slab of traditional Girl goodness.

Opening with layers of keyboards and slick, slick, slick guitars, it is obvious from the start that album number four, 'Play Dirty', finds Girlschool heading in a completely different direction. The song in question, 'Going Under', sounding embarrassingly like the Def Leppard smash 'Photograph'. A so-so cover of Marc Bolan's '20th Century Boy' reveals even more about this album, the Glam background of producers Jim Lea and Noddy Holder (both of Slade) alternating with the Leppardisms to admittedly strong effect. 'Rock Me, Shock Me', unsurprisingly falls into the chant-along category, while 'Burning In The Heat' goes as far as being a re-working of Slade's 'Burning In The Heat Of Love', which while delivered with gusto, only really pays off through a striking guitar solo. In the liner notes, which feature numerous interviews with the band put together by Classic Rock's Dave Ling (who sites '...Dirty' as his favourite Girlschool album), it is revealed that Spencer Proffer, who took Quiet Riot to fame in the U.S., had expressed a strong interest at the time in flying the band to L.A. and Americanising them. As McAuliffe herself states "You never know what might've happened if we'd got on that plane…". Five bonus cuts round things out, '1 2 3 4 Rock 'N' Roll' a romp-a-stomp of Glam ala Suzi Quatro, 'Like It Like That' bringing more convincing Leppard licks while updated versions of 'Don't Call It Love' and 'Tush' fail to improve on the originals. '... Dirty' may have confused at the time, but it stands up remarkably well to fresh scrutiny.

As ever from Cherry Red, the clam-shell box, original artwork reproduction card-sleeves and discs are all things of beauty, while the images and vintage reviews in the booklet, along with Ling's detailed essay add genuine value.

Interestingly, in the essay Ling describes 1985's 'Running Wild' as an out and out mistake, so it's no surprise that equally respected Rock-scribe Malcolm Dome gathers together producer Nick Tauber and McAuliffe's thoughts for the booklet of the separately available re-issue of said album; the band having moved from the ailing Bronze label to Mercury for its release. However much change had happened, McAuliffe, Dufort and Weston (now credited as Weston-Jones) joined by lead singer Jackie Bodimead and guitarist Cris Bonacci. Even given that turmoil, the smooth AOR that pumps out of the album's title track (think Outside Edge!) is unexpected. Add in Bodimead's Carol Decker (T'Pau) meets Joan Jett delivery and it's no surprise that there are basically no Girlschool trademarks anywhere to be found. McAuliffe herself (at pains to point out that she still rates '...Wild') admits that it shouldn't have carried the name Girlschool and really she hits the nail on the head. For this is the sound of a band making a cracking album (well, apart from an appalling cover of the Kiss classic 'Do You Love Me'. Ouch!) that was sure to alienate the very people they hoped would buy it. However for AOR lovers, I'd suggest this is a lost gem that shines radiantly in this new light.

Hats off to the Lemon/HNE/Cherry Red team for doing a superb job of polishing up a really eclectic bunch of albums, from an underappreciated U.K. act who blazed a trail for women in Rock and Metal; producing some stunning songs and albums in the process. To their credit Girlschool still tread the boards to this day. It may be six years since they released an album of new material, but with a legacy as strong as that presented here, they've more than enough in their locker to ensure they can still play dirty on another hit and run…

Steven Reid

PAVLOV'S DOG – 'THE PEKIN TAPES' *(Rockville)* — PROGRESSIVE

The gravy train keeps on rolling. After the rediscovery of Pavlov's Dogs' patchy third album 'Has Anyone Here Seen Siegfried', we have this little bunch, some of the first things they recorded, which were taken to record companies with ABC paying $650,000 but asking for a re-recording, so this is a leftover which could be seen as a useless cash grab.

Thankfully, this gravy train is tasty. Yes, we've heard these tracks before, but that doesn't make them any less exciting; the tracks on debut 'Pampered Menial' are bigger and warmer, but these have a gentle charm. 'Fast Gun' still has that gorgeous unfolding riff, rolling down a hill and meeting the shrieking organ of 'Natchez Trace' whilst the Honky-Tonk Funkiness of 'Stomp Water Magic' has organ and violin goodness.

One of the selling points here is the full version of 'Preludin And Fellacio In E Minor' which is only a scrap on the debut. Here it's very Prog, unfolding with no urgency until a bass grabs it by the lapels and a whizzy synths nods approval and snakes around the building notes; if we end up at a faceless monolith, rather like yomping ten miles to end up at a shopping centre, is it a frippery? Whatever, the journey is nice.

David Surkamp's Roger Chapman bleat is an acquired taste of course, but their talent and possibility are palpable; the bonuses are earliest available recordings and are not necessary or particularly welcome, but this is really enjoyable. Let's not beat about "le bush" here, it's not essential, but with scant offerings from a pretty exemplary combo, this is a bit of a treat; enjoyable and much fun to be with.

If these are baby pictures, cooing over them is mandatory.

Steve Swift

RICK WAKEMAN – 'FIELDS OF GREEN', 'IN THE NICK OF TIME – LIVE IN 2003' *(Cherry Red/Esoteric)* — PROGRESSIVE

Rick Wakeman, ordering a curry whilst a band mates solos, appearing on 'Grumpy Old Men' as a sort of "why aren't Reliant Robins around anymore?", "why aren't there Mods and Rockers in Brighton these days?", "why am I raging against the dying of the light?" and other such comments (allegedly). However, he does have a fine array of music under his cape and here are two of them; a mid-1990s offering and a live album.

The re-appointing of 1996's 'Fields of Green is an often barely exciting ragbag. We have a re-working of 'Starship Trooper', much as a piece of cheese with a gherkin on it is "re-worked", sounding thin even though he goes for it, whilst a cut and shut of an 1997 election night theme tune and 'Arthur' is a lot better than might be expected, processing with horns aplenty and whizzy synth goodness.

But this doesn't sustain at all. 'The Promise Of Love' is trite, pan-pipe synths not adding one iota and 'The Spanish Wizard' is aimless noodling in the most of anodyne of Emerson styles. And the MOR 'The Never Ending Road' even has the phrase "Tinker, tailor, soldier on..." running through it. At least 'The Fighter' has a bit of drama, with Chrissie Hammond's role-playing vocals rather special and the solo rearing up, even though there is an attempt at jauntiness which is misplaced; 'The Nice Man' meanwhile is fun and even though it sounds like an 1980's TV theme tune, syncopation in the singing and squelching in the synths is very enjoyable, mixed with a glorious organ solo and energy to burn.

Generally though, this is an anodyne bore, a reminiscence and a comfort in the past. Of course we love Prog of the past, foolish and ridiculous to discount such splendid music, but this is the sound of the past with little interest for the present. Perhaps a question for 'Grumpy Old Men' should be "why can't this album be better?"

The live album is much more like it. Recorded live with the New English Rock Ensemble, the title may be a reference to Damian Wilson allegedly pulling out of the project and Wakeman mainstay Ashley Holt filling in at short notice. Out of adversity and all that; Holt and the rest of the performers here turn in stupendous performances, really bringing this challenging music to life. And to be fair to Wakeman, he doesn't stint; as well as the orchestra, there's also a choir to add heavenly warbling and heft to an already hefty canon.

It is Wakeman's spectacular, massive music which leads this album to a place of pleasure. Nowhere is this better illustrated than 'The Cathedral In The Sky', the church organ and the orchestra woven in, almost tipping the whole thing over but just staying behind the line, Holt really releasing his dramatic side, almost musical theatre but not quite. This is exciting music too, opener 'Catherine Parr/Beware Your Enemies' so big that it fills your whole room with Prog until you're breathing the very essence of old-school goodness, but fear not, 'Dance Of A Thousand Lights' is a beautiful Christmassy piano workout, the lightest of sorbets. And then 'Wurm' gives those great players the solos they have undoubtedly earned; Wakeman himself of course, but six-stringer Ant Glynn really takes the opportunity to show us what he can do – that they don't bore us is a thing of wonder.

What these albums do is remind us that what Rick Wakeman actually does, amid all the TV frippery, is deliver unashamedly overblown Prog which is often excellent. Bless him for that.

Steve Swift

SAD CAFÉ – 'LIVE' *(Cherry Red)* — MELODIC ROCK

I still remember as if it were yesterday listening to Radio Caroline in 1977 and hearing for the first time a track from the debut album ('Fanx Ta-Ra') by a new band called Sad Café and being blown away by it. Over ensuing days, most of the tracks from the album were played

and I knew I had to own it.

Subsequently SC became a very important part of my musical world (not least because my wife to be also liked them too) and this despite my general dislike of saxophone. I saw them many times in concert, and they were never short of excellent; for a time they were pretty successful with both chart albums and singles plus sell-out gigs at the U.K.'s largest venues such as Hammersmith Odeon and Manchester's Apollo Theatre where this album was recorded over three nights (I said they were big) in 1980 after the release of fourth studio album ('Sad Café').

Whilst being known for their biggest hit, the ballad 'Every Day Hurts', they certainly Rocked, listen to 'Keeping It From The Troops' and 'My Oh My' as examples. They were masters of the Melodic Rock genre, as we know it today, as this collection of terrific songs proves.

'On With The Show' is an apt opener, it builds in power and features some wonderful guitar solos from Ashley Mulford while 'Emptiness' has vocalist Paul Young sounding not unlike Mick Jagger. Mulford's playing is terrific throughout, he's a man who knows how to construct a solo and with several of the band providing backing vocals there's depth and richness to the arrangements.

The album is chock full of melodic gems clearly being played by a band that's on the top of its game, which makes the subsequent issues and fallings out all the more annoying.

'Hungry Eyes' is a classic power ballad with Vic Emerson's lush keyboards providing the perfect foundation for Young's impassioned vocals. 'What Am I Gonna Do?' has a great chorus and of course the aforementioned '...Hurts' is the show's centrepiece.

'Black Rose' is another highlight amongst a selection of terrific songs; of the sixteen tracks on offer there's only the band's perennial encore, 'Bell Ends', that doesn't do it for me, being a contrived, elongated and shouty finale. The extra capacity over vinyl means the inclusion of 'I Believe (Love Will Survive)'; it's incredible to think this was omitted from the original release given it was one of their standout songs.

The majority of the material has stood the test of time as this album proves; it's also a worthy representation of how good the band was live.

Gary Marshall

TERI TIMS – 'TERI TIMS' *(Z Records)* MELODIC ROCK

The origins of this album are a little sketchy so say the least, as this album has been available in various guises at different times. First appearing in 2001 on the Target label with the title 'Whole Lotta Trouble', another version with an altered track listing known as 'Made In U.S.A.' surfaced in 2005, then 2009 saw an independent self-titled version, though with the same tracks as '...Trouble'. Now having an official U.K. release courtesy of Z Records, this adaption of 'Teri Tims' has the '...U.S.A.' version ten tracks. Confused yet?

For the record, Teri Tims is a native of Keithville, Louisiana, and possesses a wonderfully sultry, earthy and soulful vocal that brings to mind Stevie Nicks and Janis Joplin, while also conjuring up images of some of the female Rock singers who were around when this album was recorded in the late eighties and early nineties (such as Sandi Saraya, Chrissie Steele, Alannah Myles and Vixen's Janet Gardner). She is also the wife of AOR legend Paul Sabu, who naturally is involved with the making of this record, performing guitars and backing vocals.

The overall sound of the album has a very dated feel – not simply a consequence of the period it was recorded, but because of the overuse of the Fairlight programming that compounds the majority of the instrumentation. However, once you get over the passé arrangements, there are some pretty good songs lurking within. There's a definite Pop/Rock feel to the music, with some elements of Country Pop à la Shania Twain thrown into the mix, though the lyrics of 'I Can Never Dance Enough' and the duet 'Turn Me On' stray too far the wrong side of twee. Yet, on the flipside of the coin, when Tims' "Down South" roots surface in the Cajun flavours of 'Drop You Like A Habit', 'Heartbreak Hall Of Fame' and the Bluesy 'Roll Dem Bones' you can hear just what the husband and wife duo are capable of creating.

Elsewhere, 'Rock Hard', 'Out Of Control' and 'Bad Love' are classy AOR with a moody edge, 'Home Is Where The Heart Is' is a thoroughly decent eighties-style power ballad, and the catchy 'Midnite In Your Eyes' could easily have been a crossover Pop/Rock chart hit back in the day.

Apparently a new album is under construction, but that has been the case now for some time, so when that will surface is anyone's guess. Let's just hope it arrives while this particular genre is in vogue to avoid it befalling the same dated sound of this album.

Ant Heeks

KISS – 'LOVE GUN: DELUXE EDITION' *(Universal/Mercury)* ROCK

It's 1977 and Kiss are at the peak of their powers, the career saving 'Alive' having set them on the road to superstardom, the extravagantly produced 'Destroyer' sealing the deal in bombastic style. Released the same year as 'Destroyer', 'Rock And Roll Over' stripped the band's sound back to basics, before 'Love Gun' struck the perfect middle-ground. KISS classics ensued; the unmistakable Peter Criss machine gun drum intro of the title track, the immediacy of Paul Stanley's vocal on 'I Stole Your Love' and guitarist Ace Frehley's electric 'Shock Me' all still instantly recognisable. However balancing the thrusting pose Kiss were famous for, bassist Gene Simmons leered through the manhood encasing 'Plaster Caster' and foresaw his future as a dirty old man for the piano led, but far from ballad-like, 'Christine Sixteen'. Add in the anthemic 'Tomorrow And Tonight' and sheer Rock 'n' Roll of 'Hooligan', where Criss provides a fine vocal, and there's no surprise that '...Gun' is the favourite album of many a Kiss fan… although the less said about the questionable version of 'Then She Kissed Me' the better. This updated version is re-mastered by Kevin Reeves, the sharp sound a revelation that as ever, will split opinion. Good though it is (and it is) I'll be more likely to stick with the familiar original.

However with the band now finally willing to delve into the vaults to release some of their countless unheard recordings, this two disc 'Deluxe Edition' offers up six previously unreleased demos (alongside the repetitive 'Reputation', which was initially released on the recent compilation 'KISS40'), a 1977 radio interview with Gene Simmons and three previously unreleased live recordings from the same year. Of the demos, three Simmons efforts (including the '... Sixteen'-like 'Reputation') lead the way. A plodding 'Much Too Soon' sounds like it belongs to the bassist's 1978 solo album and a rough version of '...Caster' a revealing insight into the song's progression. Then we get a "teaching demo" where Stanley talks and demonstrates his way through how '...Gun' should be played, before a cracking full version of the song itself reveals a few guitar licks that didn't make the final arrangement.

The Simmons interview unveils the beginnings of the pompous self-aggrandising chap we all now know and (ahem) love (the part where he explains that those who spend their lives telling you how to live yours are all fools is laughably ironic), before an instrumental run through of '...Tonight' gets things back on track. Finally, the excellent 'I Know What You Are' would have fitted on the main album perfectly, Simmons in fine voice as a cool groove grows behind him. Add in the three live tracks, '...Gun', '...Sixteen' and 'Shock...', which capture the band in full (and less 'Alive II' polished) glory and as a long standing KISS fan, this disc alone makes buying this superbly packaged edition, with its interesting liner notes and artwork a must.

If you don't own 'Love Gun', then you should, it really is a perfect snapshot of Kiss at their best and with the added value, this version is the one you should go for.

Steven Reid

THE QUIREBOYS – 'THIS IS ROCK 'N' ROLL II' *(Off Yer Rocka)* ROCK

In 2001 The Quireboys released 'This Is Rock 'N' Roll' to herald their return to being a going concern. Recorded at EMG Studios in L.A., Spike and Guy Griffin definitely reaffirmed their writing partnership after their split, eight years previously. Now, after their resurgence yet again and gaining many new fans in the U.K. and U.S. (following several appearances on the Monsters Of Rock Cruise and successful trips to the U.S.), they have decided to re-package and re-release the album as 'This Is Rock N Roll II' with four bonus tracks.

Released on U.K. label Off Yer Rocka, the album, which was produced in the most part by C.J. Eiriksen (the bonus tracks being produced by the legendary Chris Tsangarides), sounds as gritty and raw as it ever did. This is something I feel the bonus tracks, whilst all personal favourites of mine, lack a little as they are far brighter sounding. Not usually a bad thing, but the QB's pride themselves on their down and dirty sound. The four 2014 recorded classics are 'Hey You', 'Misled', '7 O'Clock' and 'There She Goes Again'. I must say that you can't fault this band for their tenacity and sheer hard work to get back up to the forefront of the Rock scene and, whilst they have had quite the revolving door of drummers, ex-Union drummer Dave McCluskey is now firmly in the fold and has added a great depth to their performance.

Currently on their 30th anniversary tour, get out and see The Quireboys if you can. Definitely a band giving their all and this album is testament to that. For a free download of the 2014 version of 'This Is Rock N Roll', produced by Chris Tsangarides and NOT on the album, please follow http://thequireboys.believeband.com/ and enjoy!

Sue Ashcroft

MULTIMEDIA

DEEP PURPLE – 'LIVE IN VERONA' *(Eagle Vision)* ROCK

It doesn't seem five minutes since I reviewed Deep Purple's 'Live At Montreux' release which, like this, was recorded in 2011. Also like this, it was performed with an orchestra. And it had a set-list like this – EXACTLY like this. Yes, Purple release a great deal of live material, but what's the point of another show from the same tour, with the same set? Setting things right would be my guess.

Purple pioneered the whole Rock band/orchestra thing and the Montreux show was great, with the exception of Ian Gillan's performance. The vocalist struggled badly with anything in his upper register which meant the show was not what it should have been. Realistically, I'm not expecting Gillan to be able to hit every soaring note he nailed in the 1970s. The amount of singers who can do that at his age I can count on one hand and still have enough fingers left for a couple of rude gestures. However on that particular night, he was far from his best. I'm not somebody who judges them on one night and says 'Yeah, he's past it, his voice has gone.' He could easily have been under the weather and his performance at the Jon Lord tribute concert was much more like what I expect from him nowadays, proving he can still deliver.

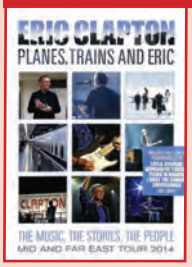
'Live In Verona' is superior to the Montreux show in every conceivable way. The orchestra, conducted by Stephen Bentley-Klein, plays superbly and they mix so well with the band that often it feels just like a really full-sounding Purple show. The songs sound rich as a result and the venue is stunning, making for a far better visual than the Montreux show. Purple play exquisitely and as for Gillan, he sings his heart out. His performances here are some of the best he has delivered in recent times.

When Purple open with 'Highway Star' you can usually see how Gillan is going to be by how he handles that number. Here he performs it with gusto. Yes, the highest screams elude him, but the rest of his range sounds great. The lower songs like 'Maybe I'm A Leo' work beautifully and his delivery of 'When A Blind Man Cries' is excellent.

The other major selling point is that the audience is really into the performance and the band reflects that. I've seldom seen Purple grin as much as they do throughout this show and the energetic encore of 'Hush' encapsulates that perfectly. With a killer set delivered by highly skilled professionals in enthusiastic form, 'Live In Verona' is the most enjoyable Purple live recording I've witnessed for ages.

James Gaden

ERIC CLAPTON – 'PLANES, TRAINS AND ERIC' *(Eagle Vision)* BLUES/SOUL



'Planes, Trains & Eric' comprises of concert footage and a bit of a sentimental travelogue about Eric Clapton's recent tour of the Middle and Far East. The message coming from the interviews interspersing the songs from Clapton and his band was it's a good life, but can he keep touring now he's approaching seventy?

As far as the music is concerned, it is unsurprisingly professionally perfect by a band of seasoned musicians including Steve Gadd on drums, Nathan East on bass and Chris Stainton on a rather jangling piano. Of note for me was Paul Carrack, whilst best known for being the lead singer for Mike And The Mechanics, he is an accomplished organist and showed it by trading licks with Clapton.

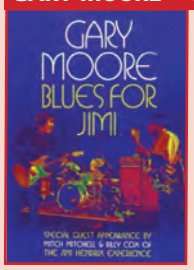
The songs consist of three broad categories: Stadium Rock, Blues and acoustic. For me the Stadium Rock ones worked the best with 'Pretending' and 'Cocaine' going down a storm. The purists will certainly appreciate the Blues numbers such as 'Hoochie Coochie Man' and 'Crossroads. I personally thought there a few too many acoustic numbers; 'Layla' was one of those of which I would have preferred to hear the electric version. Interestingly, Clapton's classic acoustic number 'Tears In Heaven' was Jazzed up a bit into a Reggae-ish version which could have sat side by side with 'I Shot The Sherriff' which appeared earlier in the set.

An interview with Japanese promoter Mr Udo, a lifelong friend of Clapton, was full of emotion and he was saying in no uncertain terms that Clapton can come back to Japan whenever he wants but please make sure he spends quality time with his wife and daughters.

Even if this is not the final tour for Clapton, this would appear to be the last one on this scale and so this high quality DVD provides a fitting tribute to Eric Clapton's stage craft.

Rob McKenzie

GARY MOORE – 'BLUES FOR JIMI' *(Eagle Vision)* BLUES/SOUL



The late lamented Gary Moore had trodden quite a few musical paths in his career. From the Progressive Jazz fusion touch of Colosseum II to Hard Rocking with Thin Lizzy, while his solo years showcased his Melodic Rock sensibilities, yet took a turn towards the Blues in his later years. Having experimented with many styles, the return to his Blues roots at the turn of the century also saw him touch on the power trio aspect with Ginger Baker and the late Jack Bruce in BBM as well as collaborating with the likes of Blues legend BB King. There can be no doubting his pedigree.

This particular souvenir, recorded and filmed at the London Hippodrome on 25th October 2007, entitled 'Blues For Jimi' logs a unique evening. The gig formed part of the launch for the Jimi Hendrix 'Live At Monterey' programme featuring Moore and his band (Dave Bronze on bass and Darrin Mooney on drums) performing classic Hendrix tracks. Moore is/was perhaps one of few guitarists who could do justice to the Hendrix style and legacy. Yes, there will be many who can play the notes, but few who could play with the feel of Moore.

Introduced as "an inspirational guitarist in his own right" and launching into a distorted 'Purple Haze', with all three instruments blazing a fury of sound like it was 1968, gives a very authentic feel right from the off. The moment when 'Manic Depression' kicks into 'Foxy Lady' is classic. The frenzied solo towards the end of 'I Don't Live Today' is glorious and just watch out on the film footage for Moore going through the full range of his facial grimacing as he delivers what might be "the" solo of the set.

Naturally the Strats are out in force although the Flying V comes out for 'Angel' and of course the Hendrix highlights – what you might call "the hits" – are there and while 'Foxy...' may conjure up images of Garth Algar from 'Wayne's World' for some, there's a "move over rover" call during 'Fire' which raises a smile as well, showing that for all the intensity of the music, there are moments of relaxation and inspiration as well.

Forty minutes in we get the treat of Billy Cox and Mitch Mitchell from the Jimi Hendrix Experience to add their weight to proceedings. Having only had the chance to rehearse the night before, the element of winging it and improvising seems strangely apt and as Cox says "we're having fun and when I stop having fun on stage I'm retiring!" They indulge in the lengthy workouts on 'Red House' (with Cox sharing vocals) and 'Hey Joe' whilst the encore sees a ten minute blast through 'Voodoo Child' complete with the almost inevitable teeth plucking moment right at the very end – Moore gets a few plucks/bites in before grimacing through the final few notes and one last step on the wah-wah pedal.

The bonus of a DVD capturing the event on film allows that extra glimpse into the visual aspect and in particular that quality and passion which Moore wrings out of his instrument – the touch, texture and clarity of the sound of each note. What's also apparent is his clear love of the material, having seen Hendrix as a fifteen year old in Belfast in 1967 and allowing him to celebrate not only Hendrix but deliver what turns out to be a fitting tribute to Gary Moore and Mitchell too.

Mike Ainscoe

GENESIS – 'THREE SIDES LIVE', 'SUM OF THE PARTS' *(Eagle Vision)* PROGRESSIVE

If anybody asks me "what is my favourite band?" my answer is invariably Genesis, up to a point; well two really. Those points are 1975 when Peter Gabriel left and 1977 when Steve Hackett departed. Until then, Genesis to me were the most inventive and original band out there, both visually and musically.

'Three Sides Live' is a concert that has appeared before as part of 'The Movie Box' collection and was recorded after the aforementioned events in November 1981 (following the release of 'Duke' and 'Abacab'). The bulk of most of this recording comes from those releases, but keep in mind though that this is not the whole show; I have never attended a Genesis concert that only lasts eighty-one minutes (and that's including the backstage and interview parts) and I would bet that the bits they have cut from this are the likes of 'Dodo/Lurker' and 'Who Dunnit?'.

'No Reply At All', 'Me And Sarah Jane' and 'Man On The Corner' are too reminiscent of member's solo projects and nowhere near strong enough to stand with the good stuff. 'Abacab' and 'Turn It On Again' are okay which leaves 'Behind The Lines', 'Duchess', the medley of 'In The Cage', 'The Cinema Show', 'The Colony Of Slippermen' and 'Afterglow' being tracks I prefer more. The footage is a thing of its time (being originally filmed in 16mm) which makes it appear quite soft compared to the HD stuff we get today. The sound has been mixed to 5:1 and the concert footage is interspersed with backstage stuff and interviews etc.

Apart from the concert footage, there is also forty-eight minutes of live audio featuring seven complete songs, some of which are in the footage, but also include 'One For The Vine', 'Fountain Of Salmacis' and 'Follow You, Follow Me' which I would have preferred to some of those mentioned above. Once again, I would imagine that many fans will have the box-set, and will give this a miss, but it would be of interest to those who don't have it.

Moving onto the second visual release from Genesis, 'Sum Of The Parts', which many fans will already have seen as it was broadcast on the BBC in October as 'Together And Apart'. The DVD itself is an all encompassing career spanning item featuring contributions from Tony Banks, Phil Collins, Gabriel, Hackett and Mike Rutherford (the classic line-up), and their original guitarist Anthony Phillips. There are numerous interviews with these people and others, alongside lots of archive performance footage, most of which we have seen before but there are a couple of bits that I for one haven't seen.

The press release states, "it's a captivating story, told from the beginning for the very first time". Well no, I have seen numerous visual releases that tell the Genesis story, but what this has is "an exploration of the dynamic between the band members that has enabled them to survive numerous line-up changes, alongside solo careers outside of the band". So, not only are all the Genesis albums featured but we also get info about the different solo albums that everybody has done, in chronological order.

What I always tend to find with things like this is that they generally don't tell me anything new because having seen every tour since 'The Lamb' in 1975 and having all the albums, I know a fair bit about them. What I liked about this though was the fact that all the major players were there (no Ray Wilson though) and all seemed happy to be there. Normally, you always get one who has thrown the dummy out and is not in the mix. Consequently, you get quite a lot of banter between members, like Gabriel calling Banks "a difficult bastard" while sat next to him; you have to imagine that they are still mates. Having said all that though, there was one thing I learned that I didn't know before and that is that Banks has stated that Collins didn't play 'In The Air Tonight'. While this point is discussed by both people, at separate times, I might add, it doesn't really go in depth.

I actually enjoyed watching this as I put it on to scan through initially to see what the format was, and ended up watching it all the way through. I'm still not sure if others will buy it, particularly as it has been broadcast on TV, but it kept me quiet for ninety minutes.

Andy Brailsford

GUNS N' ROSES – 'APPETITE FOR DEMOCRACY: LIVE AT THE HARD ROCK CASINO – LAS VEGAS' *(Universal)* HARD ROCK

One often wonders what we haven't had from Guns N' Roses; and yet here it is, a DVD of their residency at the Hard Rock Casino in Las Vegas. The DVD contains twenty-five live songs (from 'Appetite For Destruction' and 'Chinese Democracy') plus interviews with Dizzy Reed, Tommy Stinson, Ron "Bumblefoot" Thal and DJ Ashba. The compilation of songs is also included in a 2CD format as well as being available in 3D and Bluray.

Despite the obstacle-course-like stage set-up with bridges and platforms over the crowd, I feel with a DVD you lose some of the effect by being able to see it all happen, such as Ashba rising up above the stage to open the show with 'Chinese Democracy'. Working easily through numbers such as 'It's So Easy' and 'Rocket Queen', I sometimes feel the camera doesn't capture the bigger picture of the show, focusing only on one element or musician at a time which, while detailed, leaves the show feeling rather bitty.

You do get however, the feeling of camaraderie between the rather sizeable band now; the more Punk-inspired solo songs by Stinson and Thal also bring some great diversity. 'November Rain' sees Axl Rose take to the sky on his piano as it swings out over the crowd; certainly something a little different though it seemed rather unnecessary for such a high-profile song. 'Don't Cry' has Thal to thank for a beautifully played opening while 'Civil War' brings the band's dynamism and energy together. There's a great "recorded" moment in 'Nighttrain' where Rose tosses his whistle off to the side of the stage, missing the stage-hand by a few feet; credit to the guy because he still manages to dive to the side and catch it. More moments like this would have made this a little more special. During 'Patience' there's a couple of close-up shots of the crowd singing along – a style of shot that is actually minimal throughout, whilst Ashba has a few moments of respite sitting astride the stage railings; definitely the most playful member of the band with the camera.

What would the final song be without one final costume change? We're onto leather with studs now with yet another hat for 'Paradise City' and the dancers reappear too, lending a slightly cheesy "altogether now" vibe to the ending.

The interviews are interesting and insightful, from the origins of the name "Bumblefoot" to Stinson on the band's "instinctual" relationship. They also give an insight into the disparate origins of the band members and their diverse influences from Ashba naming John Williams, to Deep Purple for Reed and The Clash for Stinson.

It's a great DVD for those who haven't seen GN'R live or who would like to

see one of the twelve shows they performed. For me however, the magic of Guns N' Roses is in their mystery, their charisma and their simplicity in performance... and this DVD seemed to erase just a little bit more mystery and magic from this seemingly immortal band.

Sophie Brownlee

HEART & FRIENDS – 'HOME FOR THE HOLIDAYS' *(Frontiers)* ROCK

Though they've been around since 1974 and enjoyed their biggest selling period in the mid-eighties, 2013 was one of Heart's most successful years since their resurgence in 2010. To mark the end of the year, Heart staged a special Christmas performance in their hometown of Seattle, joined by a number of special guests to run through a selection of seasonal tunes and covers.

Here in the U.K. at Christmas we're normally satisfied with Noddy Holder, mince pies and a few cans of Special Brew, but in the U.S.A. things are done with more style and panache, if also a little more schmaltz. The antics of the Dickensian elfish characters that occasionally frequent the stage are something of an annoying distraction, but that aside this is a classy albeit mostly laid-back show.

They take the stage, which is dominated by an enormous Christmas tree, with a stunning take on Joni Mitchell's 'The River' on which Ann Wilson's beautiful voice simply soars, but then after the Elton John/Bernie Taupin written 'Seasons' Ann leaves the stage to let sister Nancy collaborate with the special guests, the first of which is Folk singer Shawn Colvin who sings the carols 'Rocking' and 'Love Come Down At Christmas'. Richard Marx is then introduced to sing harmony vocals with Nancy on 'All Through The Night', but I feel that for somebody of Marx's talent (and somebody who has his own Christmas release available) he is woefully under-used here. Next up is the "Red Rocker" Sammy Hagar; first of all he and Nancy duet on 'All We Need Is An Island' from Hagar's last album – it's great but the summery feel of the song is somewhat at odds with the Festive nature of the setting – but then Hagar's own composition 'Santa's Going South (For Christmas)' is a jaunty up-tempo highlight in a predominantly serene set.

Ann returns to the stage to duet wonderfully with Train's Pat Monahan on the Elvis Presley/Eagles/Bon Jovi nugget 'Please Come Home For Christmas', then Harry Nilsson's 'Remember Christmas' brings an end to the Seasonal offerings. As interesting as they are, it's when Nancy straps on her electric guitar and cranks out the riff to the classic 'Barracuda' that the crowd truly erupt for the first time and rightly reward Heart with a standing ovation for an amazing rendition of the song; Nancy and Craig Bartock exchanging guitar licks at its conclusion being a high point. It's followed by Heart's stunning take on 'Stairway To Heaven', an already epic song taken to new heights with the addition of a Gospel choir – it really shouldn't work, yet it's a truly captivating version.

All the special guests return to the stage, minus Hagar ("Sammy's in Cabo already" Ann quips at his absence), to perform Bob Dylan's 'Ring Them Bells' (first covered on the 'Desire Walks On' album) to close the show. The seasonal selections won't be to everybody's tastes, but as a different perspective of a band once again on top of their game, it makes for interesting viewing.

Ant Heeks

PAUL RODGERS & FRIENDS – 'LIVE AT MONTREUX' PAUL RODGERS – 'LIVE IN GLASGOW' BAD COMPANY – 'LIVE AT WEMBLEY' (Eagle Vision) ROCK

This excellent three show box-set features two solo concerts from the legendary former Free vocalist Paul Rodgers, packaged together with his other band, Bad Company, performing live at Wembley. Each of these three releases have been reviewed in their own right in the past here in the pages of Fireworks, so I'll simply present a brief round-up of each one.

Taking them chronologically, Montreux is up first, recorded in 1994. The show is notable for a variety of reasons. Firstly, Rodgers is in magnificent voice and his set-list spans Free, BC and classic Blues material that his voice is so perfect for. He is backed by an incredible band featuring John Smithson on bass, Jason Bonham on drums and Neal Schon on guitar. With Bonham's powerful percussion, Schon relishes the opportunity and the material here Rocks harder than normal as a result, especially Free's 'Travellin' Man'. There are guest appearances too from the likes of Toto's Steve Lukather and Rodger's future Queen colleague Brian May. It's a superb concert, which is also available on its own as a CD/DVD set.

'Live In Glasgow' was recorded in 2006, featuring Rodger's timeless voice again in full flight. Invigorated after touring with Queen on the 'Return Of The Champions' tour and performing to packed arenas, the vocalist plays an inspired collection of material, including the usual Free and BC cuts alongside The Firm's 'Radioactive' and the song 'Warboys' which would eventually be recorded for the album he did with Queen ('The Cosmos Rocks').

Last in the set is the BC disc, recorded live at Wembley in 2010. With Rodgers the main focal point, original members Simon Kirke and Mick Ralphs join him alongside guitarist Howard Leese and bassist Lynn Sorensen, both of whom were in Rodgers' solo band on the Glasgow show. It's a terrific set-list with all the Bad Company classics like 'Can't Get Enough', 'Ready For Love', 'Running With The Pack' and 'Shooting Star' juxtaposed with lesser played tracks like 'Gone Gone Gone', 'Electric Land' and 'Deal With The Preacher'. While an enjoyable show, I believe it lacks the fire of the 'Hard Rock Live' release which features a very similar set-list.

This box-set is available for about a tenner, which is superb value considering the quality of the performances and amount of music on offer. Literally the only reason I could think of for not picking it up is if you already owned the individual releases like I do! Otherwise I'd say it's essential viewing.

James Gaden

REDEMPTION – 'LIVE FROM THE PIT' *(Sensory)* HEAVY METAL

This is the second live album/DVD recorded at Prog Power U.S.A. by the wonderful Redemption. During its hour and a half time length, you will get to see one of the most talented Progressive Metal acts treading the boards today. That they do what they do with little or no visual gimmickry (only a few cinematic moments are used on a screen behind the band to help usher in the songs) speaks volumes for a band who are committed to just let their music do the talking. The music on the DVD and album are exactly the same, so I have opted to review from the DVD perspective.

After a short taped intro the band hit the stage and blast through a rousing rendition of 'Threads' and your struck at once by the guitar interplay of band leader Nick Van Dyk and Bernie Versailles, it's seamless and tight and the sound they conjure up is outstanding. When this formidable partnership can then be joined with the amazing bass and drum work of Sean Andrews and Chris Quirate, the keyboards of guest Anthony Paredes and the vocals of Fate's Warning vocalist Ray Alder, you know you're in for a real treat.

As I stated previously, there are no visual tricks so instead you get to witness a band playing some of the best Progressive Metal songs you'd ever want to hear... anywhere. So after 'Threads', you'll find songs such as 'The Suffocating Silence', the heavy as hell 'Dreams From The Pit', the melancholically emotional and dark 'Parker's Eyes', the highly melodic 'Nocturnal' (with its strong harmonic chorus) and my personal favourite (and what I believe to be one of the best Prog Metal songs ever written) 'Black & White World'. This song on its own could keep me entertained for years because to my old ears it has everything; strong melodic keyboards, powerful, emotion filled vocals, a rhythm section to die for and lead guitar work that is out of this world. The chorus all by itself deserves a place in Valhalla.

Summing up if you want to watch a DVD, shot with little or no bells and whistles, that has a great sound (5.1) and features a band that is on top of their musical game, whilst listening to a set of songs that all Prog Metal fans should want to hear then look no further than 'Live From The Pit'; it's one hell of a show.

Ian Johnson

RORY GALLAGHER – 'IRISH TOUR '74' 'GHOST BLUES' 'LIVE IN CORK' *(Eagle Vision)* ROCK

I can never get enough Rory Gallagher and this little gem is a fabulous 3DVD box-set featuring two live concerts and a documentary about the late Irish guitarist.

Firstly, 'Irish Tour '74' follows Gallagher and his band on a tour around the whole of Ireland at the height of the troubles when most people would have shied away from such a tour. Directed by Tony Palmer, this is a fantastic and gritty insight into the man, the band and the tour.

Follow that up with 'Live In Cork' which finds Gallagher returning to his home in 1987 to play a show at Cork Opera House. This has been greatly improved from the original VHS release and I'm sure that it was following this show (and of course his death at the relatively young age of 47 in 1995) that the City Of Cork decided to honour him with an annual festival to celebrate this amazing performer.

'Ghost Blues' is the third offering in the set which is more or less a biopic of Gallagher with a great deal of input and insight from his brother Donal, who still has a huge hand in making sure his late brother's legacy is recognised as it should be. There are obvious contributions from band mates Gerry MacAvoy and Ted McKenna, but also from those he has influenced – Slash, The Edge and Bill Wyman to name but a few.

Considering the original three DVDs are still selling separately for over a tenner each, this re-mastered boxed set at around £14 is an absolute bargain; a "must have" for any Rory Gallagher aficionado.

Sue Ashcroft

THE DOOBIE BROTHERS – 'LIVE AT THE GREEK THEATRE 1982' 'LET THE MUSIC PLAY (THE STORY OF THE DOOBIE BROTHERS)' 'LIVE AT WOLF TRAP' *(Eagle Vision)* ROCK

This Doobie Brothers three-disc set brings together two concerts and a documentary, all previously released separately. This is either an ideal introduction to the band or a trip down memory lane for long time fans.

'Let The Music Play' is the story of The Doobie Brothers, where current and former members of the band talk about their contributions to the group, and is interspersed with archive clips of various performances. Although little "dirt" is offered on the band's history, it's still a fascinating story of one of America's most beloved bands, one that has been Rocking for over forty years!

'Live At Wolf Trap' was filmed in 2004 and features twenty-three songs plus three bonus tracks as well as extra interviews and is recorded in 5.1 surround sound. This line-up was minus Michael McDonald and is the more Hard Rocking version of the band. Sadly it does omit many of the songs from that period – the exception being 'Taking It To The Streets'.

'Live At The Greek' was their 1982 farewell tour offering and by this time many members had come and gone, thus allowing McDonald to forefront the bands song-writing with his more Soulful approach. It's a truly legendary show filmed at the Greek Theatre L.A. and again is delivered in 5.1 surround sound. The final song 'Listen To The Music' features former members Tom Johnston, John Hartman, Michael Hossack and Tiran Porter, all joining the band on stage for a truly Rocking finale.

Ray Paul

THE ROLLING STONES – 'FROM THE VAULT: HAMPTON COLISEUM – LIVE IN 1981' 'FROM THE VAULT: L.A. FORUM – LIVE IN 1975' (Eagle) ROCK

'From The Vault' is a new series of live concerts from The Rolling Stones archive which have just been given their first official releases. These are simultaneous releases of full-length, two and a half hour concerts on DVD, DVD+2CD and DVD+3LP. They have been carefully restored and the sound has been newly mixed by the legendary Bob Clearmountain and the DVD is available in Dolby Digital Stereo, Dolby Digital 5.1 and DTS Surround Sound; frankly, and in short, they sound superb.

The first of the releases is 'From The Vault - Hampton Coliseum – Live in 1981' which was filmed at the end of the RS American Tour in support of the critically and commercially successful 'Tattoo You' album. This was the most successful tour of that year taking a then record fifty million dollars in ticket sales. There were fifty dates on the tour which ran from Philadelphia at the end of September through to Hampton, Virginia on the 18th and 19th of December. The show on December 18th, which was also Keith Richards' birthday, was the first ever music concert to be broadcast on television as a pay-per-view event. The beginning starts with pre-show footage before the band hit the stage and open with 'Under My Thumb'. It is also quite amusing to see Ronnie Wood and Richards smoking, quite literally, whilst performing. Highlights? Well the latter will depend on your own particular Stones favourites; for me personally 'Shattered', 'Miss You', 'Let's Spend The Night Together', 'Beast Of Burden', 'Tumbling Dice', Brown Sugar', 'Start Me Up' and 'Jumpin' Jack Flash'. Watch out for when Richards really does turn his guitar into an axe when an over-eager fan runs on to the stage during the band's encore '(I Can't Get No) Satisfaction'.

The second release 'From The Vault – L.A. Forum – Live In 1975' was recorded on the fourth of a five night stint at the L.A. Forum and was part of their 'Tour Of The Americas 1975' and the band's first tour with new guitarist Wood. This show is not as visual and very dark in comparison with the vibrant colours of the 1991 Hampton Coliseum show, but the sound is equally as good although the band are a lot rawer and not as polished as it became over the years. For me personally, there is a better set-list, including the classics 'Honky Tonk Women', 'Gimme Shelter', 'You Can't Always Get What You Want', 'Tumbling Dice', 'It's Only Rock 'N' Roll', 'Angie', 'Wild Horses' 'Brown Sugar', 'Midnight Rambler', 'Street Fighting Man' and the brilliant 'Sympathy For The Devil'.

Both DVD's come with a small booklet with full in-depth reviews of each concert by Richard Havers and will appeal to old and new fans alike, an essential addition to the collections of the former and a birds-eye insight into what has made The Rolling Stones such an enduring phenomenon over the years for the latter.

Mark Donnelly

TRANSATLANTIC – 'KALIVEOSCOPE' *(InsideOut)* PROGRESSIVE

In the same way one can rely on Rush to release a DVD after every tour, so too do Transatlantic; all I can say is thank goodness for that because we get to relive some quite extraordinary musical moments.

That's not to say it's all impeccable; the Roine Stolt/Neal Morse guitar duet I could live without; funnily enough I recall it more favourably from when I saw the London show, I wonder if they changed it? Some of the vocals are a little rough around the edges too, not surprising given that Morse was struck down with a heavy cold on the day of the shoot. That said, he does a remarkable job in the circumstances and gives it his all. On the plus side it does mean this is an honest and faithful recording and not one that has been "fixed" or "tweaked" in the studio.

Expansively filmed in Cologne using multiple cameras and angles, this is an excellent package that shows a group of supreme musicians delivering the goods and clearly enjoying the experience. The deluxe version comprises of 3CD, 2DVD and a Blu-Ray extravaganza which includes a lengthy tour documentary, band and individual interviews. The tour documentary certainly conveys the highs and lows of life on the road, including the revelation of Morse's cold and a scary moment when one of their flights on the first leg of the tour was aborted mid-takeoff. It was strange seeing the band perform in daylight on the Progressive Nation cruise. The footage of the band with Jon Anderson will be of interest to many. Clearly this was a career highlight for Portnoy who claims that evening's show to be one of his favourite three gigs... ever.

Back to the main DVD and although Ted Leonard was a hired hand he's not treated as such; he takes the limelight several times during the set with both vocals and guitar, not bad for a guy who initially declined the gig as the set was too complex to learn at just a couple of weeks notice. He needn't have worried.

All of the 'Kaleidoscope' album tracks appear alongside a 'Whirlwind' medley and choice selections from their earlier albums, which even the pickiest of punters would be hard pressed to complain about. Portnoy is his usual effusive self as he urges the fans to clap and sing; it has to be said they didn't need much encouragement as they relished proceedings too.

As always the band believe in value for money so as well as a three hour show there are plenty of extras including excellent bonus songs filmed at Tilburg with Thijs van Leer (Focus). Just superb!

Gary Marshall

WHITESNAKE – 'LIVE IN 1984: BACK TO THE BONE' *(Frontiers)* HARD ROCK

Like many around my age, I came aboard the "Snake train" in the very late eighties but have come to love every incarnation before and after. I accept that (these days) David Coverdale doesn't have the live voice that he once did, but then for me it's always been about the overall "fun and entertainment" value rather than just simply the main man's singing.

To commemorate the 30th Anniversary of 'Slide It In', Frontiers and 'Snake have unearthed some rare and historical footage and released it for the first time as a live CD/DVD entitled 'Live In 1984: Back To The Bone'. It's also worth pointing out the importance of this release on the personnel front. There were line-up changes during both recording and the subsequent tours documented here and now thirty years on, three members involved (in one form or another) have passed away giving everything an added poignancy.

I'd also like to clarify one thing from the off; despite "no expense spared and utilizing present technology to improve sound and picture" (personally overseen by Coverdale) these recordings (both DVD and CD) are very much of their time so if you are expecting Hi-Def footage and super clear audio that matches regular live releases in the modern day... you may be a little disappointed. Coverdale and producer Michael McIntyre have scoured and searched for the best "available" footage and recordings from 1984; including some taken from the singer's own private collection.

The DVD portion consists of three parts; the main body is made up of footage from the Super-Rock (Japan) performance in 1984 with a second segment showcasing Jon Lord's final show with the band recorded in Sweden. The final part is a bonus 'Slide It In Slide Show' that features rare unseen photos over a "musical bed" of private demos from Coverdale's personal achieves. The Super-Rock performance sees Coverdale, John Sykes, Neil Murray and Cozy Powell tearing through eleven tracks (including drum and guitar solos) featuring the likes of 'Gambler', 'Guilty Of Love', 'Love Ain't No Stranger', 'Ready An' Willing' 'Slow An' Easy', 'Soldier Of Fortune' and 'Don't Break My Heart Again'. The final Lord performance sees the legendary keyboardist playing on each of the first four songs above; although you don't actually see that much of the great man, his audible input is noticeable especially if watched straight after. These may not be the greatest 'Snake performances I have witnessed, but they are fun to watch given such legendary members on stage.

Whitesnake being Whitesnake, the audio disc portion of this release isn't what would be expected. Often combination packages simply offer an audio version of the DVD... but not this one. Instead you get a different set of recordings called 'Snakeskin Boots – The Best Of The Bootlegs' which is a collection of nine alterative recordings of similar tracks to the Super-Rock show. Again, the sound quality isn't the greatest but then they are bootlegs and for me personally that kind of adds to the charm.

Speaking of charm, Coverdale is on sparkling form in these recordings; only The Cov could get away with uttering "some advice" that "if it's in deep... if it's in long and if it's in hard... then it's in decent"...honestly I spat out my drink over my laptop during the first listen (and that's after his mention of the album title and bananas!) The audio disc is closed out by three recordings from the Super-Rock show and the four tracks from Lord's final performance as per the DVD.

Although this release doesn't have the modern recorded standards we generally expect today, it is still a quality DVD/CD combo showcasing one of the greatest Hard Rock bands (with a memorable line-up) and front-man (in my opinion) doing what they do best, which is play live. As a Whitesnake fan, I am thrilled to have this nostalgic entry in my collection and I am sure many other 'Snake fans will be too.

Dave Scott

WITHIN TEMPTATION – 'LET US BURN: ELEMENTS & HYDRA LIVE IN CONCERT' *(Dramatico)* SYMPHONIC METAL

If anyone tries to tell you that Within Temptation are not major players in the music world, then I suggest you point them in the direction of this box-set; the latest release from the Dutch Symphonic Metal masters. Seriously, I am not one to use superlatives, but I can only describe this as stunning! Not only do you get two concerts on one disc, but you also get audio of the two shows on two others.

The first concert, 'Elements', was a very elaborate arena show performed once only at the sold out Sportspaleis in Antwerp in November 2012 to celebrate the band's 15th birthday. It was quite spectacular, including everything you would want to see in a show; guest artists, a choir, an orchestra, inflatables, a fantastic light show, pyrotechnics, women on stilts… oh yes and the totally wonderful Sharon den Adel, who starts the concert as a little girl before being swallowed by a box. Yes, it really is that magical. Naturally it is a career spanning show, containing what the band considers to be their best songs. 'In The Middle Of The Night', 'Faster', 'Stand My Ground', 'Say My Name', 'Mother Earth' and 'Ice Queen' are all in there. That said, we don't get the full show on the disc, as den Adel says at the end that they had been on stage for two hours and the footage only lasts for ninety minutes. Still, at least they filmed it and we did eventually get to see most of it.

The 'Hydra' tour was the band's last project and they are still touring with this at the moment. It was not as elaborate or as large as the 'Elements' show but still a sizeable production. There are the same number of tracks as 'Elements', seventeen in total, and once again we don't get the whole show. Some of the songs appear as part of both concerts but there are only seven so it's not too bad. A lot of the songs are, understandably, from 'Hydra' such as 'Let Us Burn', 'Paradise (What About Us)', 'Edge Of The World', 'Dangerous', 'And We Run', 'Covered By Roses', 'Silver Moonlight' and 'Whole World Is Watching'. That's eight songs from the ten on the album so it was definitely the 'Hydra' show. I have said before that this band will keep growing and soon we will only be able to see them in arenas, which I personally think would be a shame but you can't stop progress. And this is something that this collection clearly shows, that the band do not rest on their laurels and will try new ideas, clearly illustrated by the inclusion of '...Run'.

I would recommend, if you have the equipment, to watch this with 5:1 audio; it's good in stereo but its better in 5:1...almost like being there. And let's not forget, if you wanted to take the music out with you, or you just wanted to listen and not watch, (but I don't know why you would), these two shows are also included in the package as two audio discs which, track wise, are exactly the same as the videos. There are no extras on the disc, but having two concerts, why would you need them?

I don't think I need to recommend buying this set. If you are a Within Temptation fan already, then I would guess that you have been eagerly awaiting this... if so, the wait is over!

Andy Brailsford

BOOKMARK

Rob McKenzie provides an overview of essential reading for music lovers everywhere

If you are short of ideas for presents, a book is a good idea – especially about a loved one's favourite band. A number of diverse genres are covered in this issue, so there should be something for everyone!

'BOOK OF HAIR METAL' MARTIN POPOFF *(Voyageur Press)*

If Fireworks had a book publishing wing (that sounds like a good idea!), this book could well be called 'The Fireworks Encyclopaedia 1979 to 1992'. Essentially, a glorious colourful book of stories, band photos and album covers of our favourite music from the glory days.

Popoff purposefully focuses on this key period but covers the bands from before this time whose roots (get it?) lead to the rise of Hair Music. As a result, the bands that get the main nod for starting it all are Slade and Sweet; interestingly the U.K. went Glam first and the raucous songs from Slade in particular resonated in L.A. For example, Quiet Riot's take on 'Cum On Feel The Noize' ended up being a massive hit when transplanted (!) to the West Coast.

Moving through the 1980s, in no particular order, there are loads of soundbites, Popoff's views and great photos covering Van Halen, Great White, Poison (perhaps the archetypal Hair Metal band) and the remoulded Whitesnake. There are some interesting views from the less famous journeymen of the L.A. scene who paint the picture of what it was like being at the right place (e.g. Hollywood) at the right time (e.g. around 1986).

The book really is the perfect accompaniment to Rock Of Ages (the musical, not the film!) and I can't really think of a key band not covered. I was really glad it covered Giuffria (the band should have been a lot bigger) and even more glad that Bon Jovi and Poison did not get more than their fair share of pages. The book focusses on giving a comprehensive viewpoint of all the bands that fit under the Hair Metal genre and not just those with the biggest record sales.

No complaints at all, yet another bumper Popoff book full of photos and memories.

Hardback, 221 pages, 11.1" x 8.6", colour photos throughout.
Details at www.voyageurpress.co.uk

'STEAL AWAY THE NIGHT, AN OZZY OSBOURNE DAY-BY-DAY' MARTIN POPOFF *(Backbeat Books)*

Martin Popoff is making a habit of writing coffee table style and visually attractive books covering the top of A-list Metal artists. So following on from Metallica and Iron Maiden, his latest book is about everyone's favourite Metal icon – Ozzy Osbourne.

The day by day format is a chronological set of diary dates of when Osbourne related things happened (e.g. anything from when Aleister Crowley was born to when Rudy Sarzo joined the band) interspersed by quotes from band members, other musicians of the period and producers giving their view on events.

Satisfyingly, whilst there are a lot of quotes coming from Osbourne himself, there is a lot from people who were front and centre such as Bob Daisley (who has a lot to say) and various Quiet Riot members (Randy Rhoads' band prior to joining Osbourne). As you would expect, there are lavish photos in full colour of the man himself and his band in their various guises and lots of ticket stubs, flyers and album covers.

The chronology covers Osbourne's Black Sabbath period as well – that is both the original period and also Osbourne's return to the fold; in fact the book also covers key dates regarding Sabbath without Osbourne. On that matter, Ronnie James Dio is mentioned a fair bit and it makes me hope a similar book will be written about him soon in this style.

The beauty of Popoff's books is that he is high profile enough to have had detailed interviews himself with all the main protagonists. For example, he had three interviews with Osbourne between 1997 and 2001 and multiple interviews with Daisley, Zakk Wylde and Bill Ward to name a few.

All in all, a high quality and informative Ozzy Osbourne treasure trove.

Hardback, 252 pages, 11.2" x 8.7", colour photos throughout.
Details at www.backbeatbooks.com

'KNOW YOUR ENEMY: RAGE AGAINST THE MACHINE' JOEL McIVER *(Omnibus Press)*

As befitting this atypical Rock band, this book by Joel McIver is a bit different from the average music biography. Rage Against The Machine is a genuine "protest band" and so the book focuses a lot on what they are protesting against. This is carried out to the extent that McIver gets views from experts in the political field on areas of interest by RATM so that the band's point of view is justified and/or understood. As a result, this is not really a light read; but it is written well and there is a certain pace to the book with minutiae well and truly excluded which is always welcome.

The story of RATM focuses, as would be expected, on the charismatic Tom Morrello, über guitarist and Harvard educated, and the dynamic singer Zach de la Rocha; less is told about bassist Tim Commerford and drummer Brad Wilk. Having said that, the book makes it clear that all four members are equally important in making the band what it is.

The book tells of the clear stance Morello has in justifying the fact that RATM protests about poverty and inequality in the world but at the same time has a lucrative record deal with a major label. Essentially, not having to worry about money allows the band to focus on their message - and by the way, they give a lot of their money to good causes.

As well as the serious sections such as wage slavery (that's all of us according to RATM!) and unjust imprisonment protests, there are some humorous sections such as Bruno Brookes not focussing when he played the expletive loaded 'Right T' on Radio One in the early 1990s. There are some well thought out views from McIver on why RATM were so successful even though they were so political. It would appear they appeared at the right time musically (bands like Jane's Addiction and Guns N' Roses were on the up) and an out-there band such as Rage Against The Machine just fitted in well. Also the political angst surrounding the Rodney King riots allowed the band to burst into the media's consciousness.

An interesting read about a controversial band.

Paperback, 244 pages, 9" x 6", colour plate sections.
Details at www.omnibuspress.com

'THE ART OF GOTHIC' NATASHA SCHARF *(Omnibus Press)*

Following its release of 'The Art Of Metal' a few months ago, Omnibus Press has just released 'The Art Of Gothic' on a suitable date, namely Halloween. Fittingly, it is a lavish coffee table book all in black and with very high quality paper and binding. It is claimed to be the first fully illustrated book to explore the aesthetics of the Gothic subculture and it does so in style.

It must be said that not all the book's two hundred and twenty four colourful pages are about music (although there is a lot of space devoted to it) but indeed the Gothic movement is in large part all about style. As a result, there are also sections on Gothic influenced films, computer games, arts and fashion – all interesting stuff supported by four hundred lavish illustrations.

As for the music related content, the concept of Goth music is broken down into a number of sub-genres such as Post-Punk, Gothic Rock, Industrial and Death Rock. In terms of fame and notoriety, the big music names covered are Siouxsie And The Banshees, the dynamic yet brooding The Sisters Of Mercy (who for a while were close to mainstream Rock with Jim Steinman-produced 'This Corrosion') and Killing Joke. The book gives interesting clues on how the classic Goth bands such as Southern Death Cult paid homage to their Glam Rock roots, but also paved the way to the 1980's dark and brooding Goth style. Album sleeve artwork abounds; all of which are striking and appealing and pretty uniform in their colour themes of black, red and white.

The book covers the full gambit of the movement to more modern times so groups such as Lacuna Coil, In Extremo (with its strong Medieval artwork theme) and of course Nightwish are covered. It was also nice to see a reference to the Lost Boys film with its Goth look but mainstream Rock soundtrack (including Lou Gramm, Jimmy Barnes, Roger Daltrey etc.).

A reasonably close cousin to Classic Rock, the Goth Rock genre has been around for a long time and is clearly here to stay. I recommend this attractive book both to devotees and the casual observer to the Gothic world.

Hardback, 224 pages, 11" x 10", colour photos throughout.
Details at www.omnibuspress.com

'PRETEND YOU ARE IN A WAR: THE WHO & THE SIXTIES' MARK BLAKE *(Aurum Press)*

Mark Blake has produced an astonishingly detailed account of the rise of The Who in the sixties. To expand, it contains a definitive story of the childhoods of the band, all from London but each with a different version of an upbringing and how they gravitated to each other and formed one of the biggest bands ever. The early musical ventures that the eventual Who members were in are mentioned affectionately and commentary is provided (without much bitterness) by musicians who were left by the wayside as The Who was formed. The book tells of how Pete Townshend learnt of the rewards the music business provides from watching his father's successful big band performances in the fifties and it would appear his mind was set on being in the business from an early age. Having an image and doing more than being on a stage "just playing" was a clear aim for The Who. As a result, Townshend, John Entwistle, Roger Daltrey and Keith Moon once together, and with help from a manager with contacts, quickly dominated the London scene and then went on to international success.

No stone is untouched from this time-boxed (i.e. up to the end of 1960s) tale and multiple contributions are included from all manner of people from the scene; mums, dads and minor musicians are all included. A nice concise afterward of what happened to the band up to the 2012 Olympics and beyond is included and provides a fitting end to this hefty book.

As for the title, 'Pretend You Are In A War'; that was how Townshend prepared himself for The Who's often ferocious live performances.

Timing is always an important aspect for any output (especially books) and this one has fortunately been published during what could be The Who's last blast, namely "The Who Hits 50" tour.

The publisher has kindly offered to Fireworks readers this book at a special offer price of £16 including U.K. P&P. To take advantage of this offer, telephone 01903 828503 or email mailorders@lbsltd.co.uk, quoting the offer code APG270 and the book ISBN 9781781311875.

Hardback, 390 pages, 9.5" x 6.3", b&w plate.
Details at www.lbsltd.co.uk

SHORT - SHARP - SHOTS OF - ROCK!

Steven Reid takes a look at new EP releases

Following a slightly lighter approach than we could have expected, **UNRULY CHILD** returns with the digital only release 'DOWN THE RABBIT HOLE - SIDE ONE'.

The "side one" part alluding that there will be a second instalment, which will then lead onto an all singing, all dancing album release. Down to the core trio of vocalist Marcie Free, Bruce Gowdy (guitars) and Guy Allison (keys), there is a slightly programmed feel to the rhythms and yet through lush harmonies, precise yet cookin' guitar bursts and engaging songs (the important bit), this EP still oozes quality. The easy hit of the title track is slick and smooth, yet interestingly unsettling at points, while 'This Is Who I Am' is a slightly more straight forward, almost John Elefante-like offering. Gowdy flexes his guitar muscles throughout, yet in a fleeting, teasing kind of manner, while Free's vocals are captivating; 'For All We Know' is a vocal master-class. The first UC release since the 2010 comeback 'Worlds Collide', '…Rabbit Hole' finds the band more restrained, dare I say, more mature. Most importantly it finds them in top form.

Lush Melodic Rock coming out of Brazil, **SUNSET MOB** have created a surprisingly accomplished introduction with 'UNDER MY SKIN'. The title track sits somewhere between Scandie and Danger Danger, 'Sail Away' proves this outfit can also do the business on the slow, wave your lighter-in-the-air tracks. Add in the keyboard surges of 'I'll Be Waiting', which is more U.S.-AOR and the ballsier, almost Skid Row at a Vega convention of 'Delusions' and this lot have potential by the sack full. Singer Pablo Pereira has a great set of pipes and only the merest hint of an accent, while guitarist Andre Cunha is a hidden talent. Produced by Henrique Baboom (Jeff Scott Soto/Richie Kotzen), 'Under...' may not be the most original thing you'll hear all year but it is presented with hummable panache.

Unearthing any solid facts on **ORPHAN** has proved challenging; a surprise when you factor in that they morphed into being from the band Mercy, who were signed to Led Zeppelin's Swan Song imprint, and that they featured a certain pre-Bon Jovi Richie Sambora. However what we have here is a debut EP, 'BORNEO - TO MELL AND BACK', the Mell in question being the sadly deceased guitarist Mell Papaterpos who died back in 2006, although it is still his guitar work which features on this gloriously retro Rock (it's hard to know just how old some of this stuff is). Keeping the Orphan flame burning is his brother and bassist Louis, and while what we have here is, at best, good demo quality, there's talent and charm galore. The music itself is light Rock with a touch of Soul and an abundance of carefree spirit. There's a touch of Moody Blues and more than a pinch of early Elton John; admittedly left field, I've found a real soft spot for this release.

Ex-Cry Of Love/Warrant/Lynch Mob front-man Robert Mason is immense on the debut EP, 'ANNUIT COEPTIS', from **STEPHEN CHESNEY FEAT. ROBERT MASON**, although without cracking songs, he wouldn't be. 'Breaking Down' has a real 'New Jersey' (the best) era Bon Jovi vibe, a song that with its upbeat kick and piano in the background, easily becomes the most immediate on show. However the more I hear the down and dirty feel of 'Bleed', where Mason out Axl's Axl Rose in the verse before he really lets loose in the chorus, the more it begins to take a strong hold in the memory. Add to that the hip-thrusting groove of 'Devil's Daughter' and Chesney/Mason have three songs that don't put a foot wrong from start to finish. I hadn't heard of Chesney before this and yet a quick search of YouTube reveals him as a serious six-string talent with a strong leaning for all things Slash. If you track this one down, I promise you won't be disappointed. In fact for fans of Mason, there's no debate to be had, you need this!

A serious blast of Metallica rushing headlong into Lynyrd Skynyrd arrives from Aussies **OCTOBER RAGE**; five tracks where guitars roar and drums pound with real intent and yet it is the infectious choruses and intricate melodies which hit hardest on 'FALLOUT, DUST & GUNS'. Slower number 'Heart Of Stone' reminds, in a good way, of a heavier Daughtry but it's the guitar focused 'Valkyrie', 'End Of Days' and 'White Walkers' which truly reside in the mind. That I've never heard of this bunch before suggests they need to raise their profile outside of their own shores. With music this good, it could reap rich rewards.

Continuing their fine run of form, **MAGNUM** offer the digital, or rather stunning looking 10" vinyl 'ON CHRISTMAS DAY', which features new recordings of the title track, which was originally from the 'Rock Art' album and 'Born To Be King', from the much maligned 'Goodnight LA'. The latter comes to life in a way the original never really did, while the new version of '…Christmas' simply confirms what a wonderful song it's always been. A longer version of the track adds value, as well as interest and even though the themes may not be merriment and cheer, this still makes the perfect Christmas present for yourself…providing you've been a good boy or girl (or both!), of course.

The very fact that 'AFTER HOURS' from **GLAMOUR OF THE KILL** features a guest slot from Papa Roach front-man Jacoby Shaddix and that the track 'Out Of Control' has been picked up by BBC Radio One, suggests I shouldn't like this, but you know what...it's bloody well superb! Proudly admitting to being influenced by 1980's Hair Metal, Iron Maiden and Thin Lizzy, that these guys can sound so current is a reason to rejoice. Hard hitting and utterly memorable, 'We Are All Cursed', 'Out Of Control' and 'Blood Drunk' make this seriously worth getting excited about. Don't be as blinkered as I was, you'll only kick yourself for it.

'Calf Stoutness Two' may open 'THE SECOND SECONDS' from West Coast movers **STATE COWS** (see what they did with that song title there?) in a bit of a 1970's TV theme tune kinda way and yet the sprightly keys, sharp electric piano and neat staccato riff hold it all together. Oddly this lengthy, and at times Jazzy, opening is instrumental, something that when the glorious vocals from Daniel Andersson arrive to make 'Into Something Good', something excellent, is all the more confusing. Maybe that these four tracks were initially available on the Japanese version of SC second full-lengther 'The Second One' (see what they did with the EP title there?) but not the standard release, explains it? 'Tinseltown', which has a sexy sax solo, is an infectious slice of Chicago-like, Toto-tastic, sparkle and goes to merely confirm that if West Coast meets AOR is your bag, then you should be all over these moo-moos.

Nearly sold out, at time of going to press, 'PAID TO PLAY LIVE - THE OFFICIAL BOOTLEG' showcases seven live tracks from the 'Paid To Play' album launch gig from **HOUSE OF SHAKIRA**. And the band sound like they're having a blast on this rough and ready recording, which really picks up the flavour of a good night out. Two unreleased studio, bonus cuts may possibly be the real hook though, 'Shell Shock' an easy going swagger of a song, 'Financial Times' a harmony led mid-paced Rocker. In truth, neither set the world on fire but if you're a mad Shakiran, then you better get your skates on, you may already be too late…

With Simon Wright (AC/DC, Dio), Scott Warren (Dio) and Bjorn Englen (Yngwie Malmsteen) on board, singer Ann Boleyn may finally have the clout round about her to make people take **HELLION** as seriously as they've always deserved. Add in young guitar talent Maxxxwell Carlisle and suddenly 'Betrayer' is a Priest-like scream, 'KARMA'S A BITCH' a Dio-inspired swipe and 'Watch The City Burn' an illustration of power and pulsating precision. Boleyn is immense, scathing vocals adding to the undeniable force of her band-mates, while Maxxxwell is a fret-find phenomenon. Karma may well be a bitch but it could be Hellion's long earned key to success…

Formed round Candlemass bassist Leif Edling, **AVATARIUM** also feature guitarist Marcus Jidell (Evergrey), drummer Lars Skold (Tiamat), keyboard player Carl Westholm (Jupiter Society) and the simply stunning voice of Jennie-Ann Smith. Imagine Rainbow or Blue Oyster Cult with a Doomy undercurrent and a female vocalist and you'll understand where 'ALL I WANT' is heading. I hope that sounds enticing, for the full five tracks on show are hugely impressive. In a slowed down, restrained fashion, Jidell evokes Ritchie Blackmore at his fiery best, while the gloomy themes are completely juxtaposed by Smith's wonderful voice. In short, she's outstanding - a word fitting for the live rendition of 'Deep Well', 'Pandora's Egg' and 'Tides Of Telepathy'. Available on vinyl or as a download, the choice to go retro or current is yours but I urge you to do one or the other, as this is a beauty.

You don't get guys like Trey Gunn (King Crimson) or Jerry Marotta (Peter Gabriel) to contribute to your music unless you have something seriously going for you and keyboardist **LEON AVARDO** undoubtedly has. 'Blood Like Red', infused by Gunn's WARR guitar, is a melancholic Sci-Fi scene setter which suddenly blooms into a World Music/Prog workout, while 'The 2014 Microcosm' feels like a Peter Gabriel instrumental. This EP, 'MUSIC FROM AN EXPANDED UNIVERSE', is well named for that's exactly what it sounds like it is.

We don't usually cover "singles" in SSSOR, however there have been a number of worthy one track releases of late, so here's a quick round-up…

The joining of a Yes legend and former bassist from Counting Crows may not seem the most obvious union, however teaming up for the charity single 'FAMILY CIRCLE', **JON ANDERSON & MATT MALLEY** easily prove otherwise. The spiritual themes, piano base and gentle synth washes take us deep into expected Anderson territory and yet the hand percussion and more contemporary melody brings something new. With all the money raised going to Flutie Foundation, Sahaja Yoga Meditation and The National Autistic Society, head to iTunes to both purchase a lovely piece of music and donate to worthy causes.

Anglo-Israeli's **CHASE THE ACE** impress with 'THE CAT IS ON THE LOOSE', where their "modern twist" on R&R actually sounds very like Ratt. Packed with energy, great vocals and superb guitar work, it's just a shame this comes housed in one of the worst sleeves I've ever seen. Whereas the separately available, 'ROCK BOTTOM ROCK 'N' ROLL', takes an AC/DC blast and sleazes it up. A simple formula but you'll be singing it for days on end.

Following on from their excellent EP 'Rozdeniye Maga', Russian Power Metal battlers **FS PROJEKT** return with the Tolkien inspired 'ZA KHLADNY GLORY', a bass drum pounding, keyboard enhanced romp where male and female voices combine. There's no denying there's a lot of this fare around right now, neither is there any point pretending that FSP don't do it extremely well - they do!

Can **BLACKWOLF** do no wrong? Magazines, including the very one in your hands, internet sites and Rock radio all falling for their charms. Put simply, no, they can't. 'KISS THE FIRE' is more of the swaggering Rock & Roll this lot specialise in and as expected it's damn good. Don't wait for BW to fall from grace any time soon. British Rock is in safe hands!

PLAYLISTS

Compiled by Ant Heeks

Take cover, there's a storm coming... Newcomers In Faith deservedly take the coveted top spot in the final writers chart of 2014.

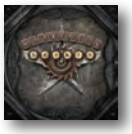
1 In Faith 'There's A Storm Coming' *(Rocktopia)*

2 Harem Scarem 'Thirteen' *(Frontiers)*

3 Ten 'Albion' *(Rocktopia)*

Bruce Mee

1. **Ten** – Albion
2. **In Faith** – There's A Storm Coming
3. **Revolution Saints** – Revolution Saints



4. **H.e.a.t** – Live In London
5. **Ammunition** – Shanghaied

Phil Ashcroft

1. **Harem Scarem** – Thirteen
2. **Sweet & Lynch** – Only To Rise
3. **In Faith** – There's A Storm Coming
4. **Bailey** – Long Way Down
5. **White Widdow** – Crossfire

Sue Ashcroft

1. **In Faith** – There's a Storm Coming
2. **Harem Scarem** – Thirteen
3. **Sweet & Lynch** – Only To Rise
4. **Massive Wagons** – Fight The System
5. **Revolution Saints** – Revolution Saints

James Gaden

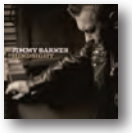
1. **Rated X** – Rated X
2. **Jimmy Barnes** – Hindsight
3. **Foreigner** – The Best Of 4 And More
4. **Michael Ball** – If Everyone Was Listening
5. **Mr. Big** – The Stories We Could Tell

Dave Scott

1. **My Own Ghost** – Love Kills
2. **Bryan Adams** – Reckless (Deluxe Edition)
3. **The Birthday Massacre** – Superstition
4. **Triosphere** – The Heart Of The Matter
5. **Whitesnake** – Live In '84: Back To The Bone

Steven Reid

1. **Nightingale** – Retribution
2. **Whitesnake** – Live In '84: Back To The Bone
3. **Bernie Marsden** – Shine
4. **King Diamond** – Dreams Of Horror
5. **Jimmy Barnes** – Hindsight



Ant Heeks

1. **White Widdow** – Crossfire
2. **Bailey** – Long Way Down
3. **Blackberry Smoke** – Holding All The Roses
4. **Harem Scarem** – Thirteen
5. **Thunder** – Wonder Days

Rob McKenzie

1. **Daylight Robbery** – Falling Back To Earth
2. **Todd Rundgren** – At The BBC 1972-1982
3. **Agnieszka Swita** – Sleepless
4. **UFO** – Misdemeanour
5. **Tony Carey** – For You

Mónica Castedo-López

1. **Harem Scarem** – Thirteen
2. **Red Zone Rider** – Red Zone Rider
3. **Sweet & Lynch** – Only to Rise
4. **Jorn Lande & Trond Holter present DRACULA** – Swing of Death
5. **Stonewire** – When the Crow Flies

Ian Johnson

1. **Nightingale** – Retribution
2. **From The Fire** – Evil*Men*Do
3. **Black Fate** – Between Vision & Lies
4. **Harem Scarem** – Thirteen
5. **Level 10** – Chapter 1

Gary Marshall

1. **Flying Colours** – Second Nature
2. **Nightingale** – Nightingale
3. **Knight Area** – Hyperdrive
4. **Tin Spirits** – Scorch
5. **Transatlantic** – KaLIVEoscope

Dave Bott

1. **In This Moment** – Black Widow
2. **Honey Ryder** – Born In A Bottle
3. **Flyleaf** – Between The Stars
4. **Lacuna Coil** – Broken Crown Halo
5. **Adrenaline Rush** – Adrenaline Rush

Ray Paul

1. **Stevie Nicks** – 24 Karat Gold
2. **Electric Wizard** – Time To Die
3. **Amulet** – The First
4. **Doomocracy** – The End Is Written
5. **Joan Jett & The Blackhearts** – Unvarnished

Carl Buxton

1. **Delain** – The Human Contradiction
2. **Allen/Lande** -The Great Divide
3. **Amaranthe** – Massive Addictive
4. **U.D.O.** - Decadent
5. **Lordi** – Scare Force One

Mike Newdeck

1. **The BossHoss** – God Loves Cowboys
2. **Outrigger** – The Last Of Us
3. **The Birthday Massacre** – Superstition
4. **Sherlock Brothers** – Monkey Made Nation
5. **Saving Abel** – Blood Stained Revolution

Az Chaudhry

1. **Pendragon** – Men Who Climb Mountains
2. **Evergrey** – Hymns For The Broken
3. **Threshold** – Before The Journey
4. **Soen** – Tellurian
5. **In Faith** – There's A Storm Comin

Duncan Jamieson

1. **Ten** – Albion
2. **Harem Scarem** – Thirteen
3. **Wicked Sensation** – Adrenaline Rush
4. **Maverick** – Quid Pro Quo
5. **Rated X** – Rated X

Ian Parry

1. **House of X** – House of X
2. **Ben Poole** – Live at the Royal Albert Hall
3. **Billy Idol** – Kings and Queens of the Underground
4. **The Fireflys** – Embers of the Autumn
5. **Soldierfield** – Catharsis

Alexandra Mrozowska

1. **Rated X** – Rated X
2. **CETI** – Brutus Syndrome
3. **In Faith** – There's A Storm Coming
4. **Dalton** – Pit Stop
5. **Kissin' Dynamite** – Megalomania

Dan Bond

1. **Black Crown Initiate** – The Wreckage Of Stars
2. **The Rods** – The Rods
3. **Battleaxe** – Power From The Universe
4. **Crobot** – Something Supernatural
5. **Avatar** – Hail The Apocalypse

Woody

1. **Issa** – Crossfire
2. **Newman** – Newman (re-issue)
3. **Xtasy** – Revolution
4. **Ten** – Albion
5. **Live** – The Turn

Alan Holloway

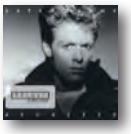
1. **Flying Colors** – Second Nature
2. **Rich Antonelli** – Voiceless
3. **Roughneck Riot** – Out Of Anger
4. **Messiah's Kiss** – Get Your Bulls Out
5. **Freak Kitchen** – Cooking With Pagans

Mick Burgess

1. **Sanctuary** – The Year The Sun Died
2. **Bigelf** – Into The Maelstrom
3. **John Wesley** – Disconnect
4. **Monster Magnet** – Milking The Stars
5. **Rated X** – Rated X

Mark Donnelly

1. **In Faith** – There's A Storm Coming
2. **Nubian Rose** – Mental Revolution
3. **Bryan Adams** – Reckless (Deluxe Edition)



4. **Fahran** – Chasing Hours
5. **Christopher Cross** – Secret Ladder

Michael Anthony

1. **Pain of Salvation** – Falling Home
2. **Various Artists** – Celebrating Jon Lord: The Rock Legend
3. **Flying Colors** – Second Nature
4. **The Pineapple Thief** – Magnolia
5. **Syd Arthur** – Sound Mirror

Helen Bradley-Owers

1. **Andrea Martongelli** – Spiral Motion
2. **Rory Gallagher** – Irish Tour '74
3. **Andrew Lloyd Webber** – Variations
4. **Persian Risk** – Rise Up
5. **Knock Out Kaine** – House of Sins

Dave Crompton

1. **Ten** – Albion
2. **Romeo's Daughter** – Alive
3. **Within Temptation** – Let Us Burn
4. **In Faith** – There's A Storm Coming
5. **United Nations** – 2014

Mike Ainscoe

1. **Steve Rothery** – The Ghosts Of Pripyat
2. **Blues Pills** – Blues Pills
3. **Haken** – Restoration
4. **Amplifier** – Mystoria
5. **Transatlantic** – KaLIVEoscope

Brent Rusche

1. **Starbynary** – Dark Passenger
2. **FYRE!** – Missy Powerful
2. **Crazy Lixx** – Crazy Lixx
4. **Adriangale** – Defiance
5. **Devin Townsend** – Z2

Bruce E.J. Atkinson

1. **Bailey** – Long Way Down
2. **T. Clemente Band** – Lost In Time
3. **Allen/Lande** – The Great Divide
4. **Vega** – Stereo Messiah
5. **Estate** – Fantasia

THE FINAL COUNTDOWN - THE BEST OF 2014

Who said Rock music was dead? 2014 has been yet another amazing year for this genre of music, the quality of the albums reviewed in Fireworks every issue is nothing short of phenomenal. Ant Heeks rounds up the Fireworks Top Ten Albums Of 2014, collated from each writer naming their top five of the year with a score awarded for each selection. Below are their five choices in full…

1. **H.e.a.t**
Tearing Down The Walls
(earMusic)
"Insanely catchy melodies and huge choruses… Utterly essential listening"
Ant Heeks FW #63

2. **Within Temptation**
Hydra
(Dramatico)
"Simply marvellous and the best Within Temptation album yet""
Dave Scott FW #62

3. **Night Ranger**
High Road
(Frontiers)
"Elements of the band's whole career… A cacophony of beautiful splendour"
Mark Donnelly FW #64

4. **Flying Colors**
Second Nature
(Frontiers)
"One of the best albums I have ever heard… Simply beautiful"
Ian Johnson FW #66

5. **Work Of Art**
Framework
(Frontiers)
"More upbeat catchy tracks… Catchy refrains… Beautifully crafted"
Alan Holloway FW #65

6. **Night By Night**
NxN
(Sun Hill/Cargo)

7. **Enchant**
The Great Divide
(Inside Out)

8. **Ten**
Albion
(Rocktopia)

9. **Vega**
Stereo Messiah
(Frontiers)

10. **Mr. Big**
The Stories We Could Tell
(Frontiers)

Bruce Mee

1. **Ten –** Albion
2. **In Faith** – There's a Storm Coming
3. **Axxis** – Kingdom Of The Night II (White)
4. **Johnny Lima** – My Revolution
5. **Magnum –** Escape From The Shadow Garden

Phil Ashcroft

1. **Enchant** – The Great Divide
2. **Flying Colors** – Second Nature
3. **Night Ranger** – High Road
4. **Night By Night** – NxN
5. **Harem Scarem** – Thirteen

Sue Ashcroft

1. **Night By Night** – NxN
2. **In Faith** – There's A Storm Coming
3. **H.e.a.t** – Tearing Down The Walls
4. **Mr. Big** – …The Stories We Could Tell
5. **Three Lions** – Three Lions

James Gaden

1. **Jimmy Barnes** – Hindsight
2. **Rated X** – Rated X
3. **California Breed** – California Breed
4. **Fozzy** – Do You Wanna Start A War?

5. **Mr. Big** – …The Stories We Could Tell

Dave Scott

1. **Kobra & The Lotus** – High Priestess
2. **Delain** – The Human Contradiction
3. **Xandria** – Sacrificium
4. **Temperance** – Temperance
5. **My Own Ghost** – Love Kills

Steven Reid

1. **Within Temptation** – Hydra
2. **Enchant** – The Great Divide
3. **Tim Bowness** – Abandoned Dancehall Dreams
4. **Vanden Plas** – Chronicles Of The Immortals – Netherworld
5. **Anette Olzon** – Shine

Ant Heeks

1. **Rubicon Cross –** Rubicon Cross
2. **H.e.a.t** – Tearing Down The Walls
3. **White Widdow –** Crossfire
4. **Three Lions** – Three Lions
5. **Ten** – Albion

Rob McKenzie

1. **Night By Night –** NxN
2. **Kasim Sulton -** 3
3. **Daylight Robbery** – Falling Back To Earth
4. **Tony Carey's Planet P Project** – Steeltown
5. **Sonic Divide** – Sonic Divide

Mónica Castedo-López

1. **H.e.a.t** – Tearing Down the Walls
2. **The Treatment** – Running With The Dogs
3. **Night Ranger** – High Road
4. **Mr. Big** – ...The Stories We Could Tell
5. **Sixx:A.M.**– Modern Vintage

Ian Johnson

1. **Flying Colors** – Second Nature
2. **A.C.T.** – Circus Pandemonium
3. **Anette Olzon** – Shine
4. **Nightingale** – Retribution
5. **Triosphere** – The Heart Of The Matter

Gary Marshall

1. **Flying Colors –** Second Nature
2. **Transatlantic** – Kaleidoscope
3. **Enchant** – The Great Divide
4. **A.C.T.** – Circus Pandemonium
5. **Scintilla Project –** The Hybrid

Dave Bott

1. **In This Moment** – Black Widow
2. **Within Temptation** – Hydra
3. **Mostly Autumn** – Dressed In Voices
4. **W.E.T.** – One Live In Stockholm
5. **Lacuna Coil** – Broken Crown Halo

Ray Paul

1. **Blues Pills** – Blues Pills
2. **Ian Anderson** – Hommo Eraticus
3. **Rival Sons** – Great Western Valkyrie
4. **Blackberry Smoke** – The Whippoorwill
5. **Night Ranger** – High Road

Carl Buxton

1. **H.e.a.t.** – Tearing Down The Walls
2. **Delain** – The Human Contradiction
3. **Within Temptation** – Hydra
4. **Anette Olzon** – Shine
5. **Dynazty** – Renatus

Mike Newdeck

1. **Euphoria Audio** – Euphoria Audio
2. **Highway Saints** – Highway Saints
3. **Quietdrive** – The Ghost of What You Used To Be
4. **Starset** – Transmissions
5. **Outrigger** – The Last Of Us

Az Chaudhry

1. **Pendragon** – Men Who Climb Mountains
2. **Transatlantic** – Kaleidoscope
3. **Work Of Art** – Framework
4. **Night Ranger** – High Road
5. **Winger** – Better Days Comin'

Duncan Jamieson

1. **Night Ranger** – High Road
2. **Mr. Big** – ...The Stories We Could Tell
3. **House Of Lords** – Precious Metal
4. **Cage The Gods** – Badlands
5. **Winger** – Better Days Comin'

Ian Parry

1. **Bernie Torme** – Flower and Dirt
2. **Magnum** – Escape From The Shadow Garden
3. **Gotthard** – Bang
4. **Judas Priest** – Redeemer of Souls
5. **Edguy** – Space Police – Defenders Of The Crown

Alexandra Mrozowska

1. **Mother Road** – Drive
2. **CETI** – Brutus Syndrome
3. **Three Lions** – Three Lions
4. **Scream Maker** – Livin' In The Past
5. **Kruk** – Before

Dan Bond

1. **Miss Behaviour** – Double Agent
2. **Mastodon** – Once More 'Round The Sun
3. **Battleaxe** – Heavy Metal Sanctuary
4. **Vega** – Stereo Messiah
5. **Heaven's Basement** – Filthy Empire

Woody

1. **Vega** – Stereo Messiah
2. **Free Spirit** – All The Shades Of Darkened Light
3. **Brother Firetribe** – Diamond In The Firepit
4. **Moonland feat. Lenna Kuurmaa** – Moonland
5. **Overland –** Epic

Alan Holloway

1. **Stiff Little Fingers** – No Going Back
2. **Vega** – Stereo Messiah
3. **Work Of Art** – Framework
4. **Striker** – City Of Gold
5. **Dalton** – Pit Stop

Mick Burgess

1. **The Dictators** – Live at The Rebellion Festival, Blackpool 8/8/14
2. **Within Temptation** – Hydra
3. **Sanctuary** – The Year The Sun Died
4. **Judas Priest** – Redeemer of Souls
5. **Opeth** – Pale Communion

Mark Donnelly

1. **Work Of Art** – Framework
2. **Night Ranger** – High Road
3. **Miss Behaviour** – Double Agent
4. **Seven** – 7
5. **L.R.S.** – Down To The Core

Michael Anthony

1. **Robbie Cavanagh –** The State of Maine
2. **Anathema** – Distant Satellites
3. **Rival Sons** – Great Western Valkyrie
4. **Opeth** – Pale Communion
5. **Robert Plant** – Lullaby And The Ceaseless Roar

Helen Bradley-Owers

1. **Nazareth** – Rock and Roll Telephone
2. **Laney's Legion** – Laney's Legion
3. **Richie Kotzen** – Essential
4. **Toseland** – Renegade
5. **Slash** – World on Fire

Dave Crompton

1. **Ten** – Albion

2. **Within Temptation** – Hydra
3. **Chris Braide** – Fifty Dollar Planets & Twenty Cent Stars
4. **Twelve Gauge** – All In
5. **H.e.a.t** – Tearing Down The Walls

Mike Ainscoe

1. **Steve Rothery** – The Ghosts Of Pripyat
2. **Empty Yard Experiment** – Kallisti
3. **Steve Hackett** – Genesis Revisited Live At The Albert Hall
4. **H.e.a.t** – Tearing Down The Walls
5. **Anathema** – Distant Satellites

Brent Rusche

1. **State Of Salazar** – All The Way
2. **H.e.a.t** – Tearing Down The Walls
3. **Primal Fear** – Delivering The Black
4. **Work Of Art** – Framework
5. **Astra** – Broken Balance

Bruce E.J. Atkinson

1. **Cage The Gods** – Badlands
2. **California Breed** – California Breed
3. **Bai Bang** – All Around The World
4. **London Quireboys** – Black Eyed Sons
5. **Coney Hatch** – Four

FIREFEST

THE FINAL FLING

Nottingham: Rock City – 24-26 October 2014

'Firefest...The Final Fling'...and now from eleven Fireworks regulars (Ant Heeks (AH), Bruce Mee (BM), Carl Buxton (CB), Dave Bott (DB), Dave Crompton (DC), Duncan Jamieson (DJ), Gary Marshall (GM), Ian Johnson (IJ), Julia Braun (JB), Mark Donnelly (MD) and Phil Ashcroft (PA)) is our review of these momentous final three days.

Firefest was a festival that had been as much about the people and "family" as it had about the music: be that between the crew, the artists or you, the all important fans. What had always been a weekend full of emotion promised to be something special given the importance of the occasion. Among the twenty-one bands invited to join the party were ones providing either unique one-off performances, special reformations plus the return of a handful of festival favourites.

DAY 1 – Fri 24 October 2014

To open any Firefest day could be looked upon as something of a poison chalice (although I'm sure any band would rather be given the chance than not be involved at all); but to be the inaugural band of 'The Final Fling' must have placed copious amounts of pressure and responsibility upon **ANGELS OR KINGS**: their main premise, to get the party off to a memorable flier whilst hopefully recruiting new admirers. Factor into the equation they were winners of the "fans choice" competition on ARFM radio and had not played live for over two decades, one really began to empathise and appreciate the enormity of their task.

At 1-20pm the customary welcome from Mr ARFM himself, Steve Price, bellowed out to a rather sparse audience, and just five minutes later the infamous curtain that we have grown so fondly of fell inelegantly to the floor, heralding the beginning of the end of Firefest. 'Any Other Girl' instantly injected some urgency into the arriving multi-national hordes, who resembled ravenous cannibals eager to gorge on every note, every chord and every drum beat as they jostled in the gloom for prime viewing positions. It was the perfect song to open with; a driving rhythm, rumbling bass and swirling keyboards epitomized the band's sound. Understandably they appeared nervous and static initially, with the exception of lead vocalist, Barrie 'Baz' Jackson, whose rallying, almost Metal-edged screams juxtaposed with luscious vocals were a joy to witness. It wasn't long before his vociferous manner began to infect the rest of the band and 'A Harder Place' underscored just what a stylish band they were. It was apt that 'Ice Turned To Rain' followed – all the frigidity within the band (and the audience, who clearly felt their nerves and were desperate for them to deliver) began to melt away.

Rock City was now bathed in multi-coloured lighting and three-quarters full of people who sang, swayed and nodded their heads to one another in approval. On stage the band were now embracing the momentous occasion; guitarist and Tina Turner impersonator (Jackson's words, not mine!!) Tony Bell began to strut around with a grin as wide as the West Pennine moors; Steve Kenny threw some classic poses as he delivered his measured solos and riffs (despite being subdued by the mix); bass man Rob Naylor and Andy Chemmey on drums maintained the tempo impeccably whilst Dave Ellis on keyboards added those quintessential flourishes of melody. 'If Her Tears Could Talk' and the stirring title track off 'Kings Of Nowhere' rounded off the set in emphatic fashion amid expressive appreciation from a very knowledgeable gathering – it was a huge 'A'OK from me too!! (DC)

Set-list: Any Other Girl / A Harder Place / Ice Turned To Rain / If Her Tears Could Talk / Kings Of Nowhere.

Performing second on Firefest opening day was the Greek-German Melodic Hard Rock band **REDRUM** and quickly set the place on fire. Redrum started as a project in 2003, afterwards Athan 'Lyssa' Kazakis and Panos Baxevanis decided to add the skills of exceptional vocalist Michael Bormann to their already fine, authentic material with their debut 'No Turning Back' being released in 2007. This sextet certainly showed how much AOR is still alive and even though many say Bormann is a Bon Jovi double, he puts all the energy from his heart into every single piece of music he has ever written. And that's exactly what was experienced during this appearance.

The band kicked off their set with the heavy and highly energetic 'One of Us / Scream' where the crowd quickly welcomed the "easy to sing along" chorus; glasses and fists were raised and Rock City had woken up.

Regardless of the early slot on day one, Redrum delivered a high-quality performance and even the sceptics could be observed tapping their feet. There were catchy riffs, numerous well-placed sing-along parts, heavily hammering beats all of which were irresistible while the multitude of twin-guitar harmonies kind of reminded me of several good old 1980s Melodic Rock bands. Inevitably it all combined to equal a fantastic time for everyone present.

'You Can't Buy No Hero' provided some insane guitar riffs and a rather cheesy chorus; it was an awesome track though. 'Thirsty For Love' spread a flood of positive feelings across the crowd despite the fact that this track is neither extraordinary in terms of song-writing nor in musical elements; it delivered some fantastic energy and got straight into the heart. 'Judgement Day' seemed to be a welcomed heavy alternative for those amongst us who like it less sweet. This track even contained Hard Rock some Progressive elements and an incredible solo. Hell yes!

Marco Grasshoff introduced 'Heart To Heart' with a brilliant keyboard-line and when the band joined in, they let the song emerge as a nicely dark-sounding, thoughtful track. During their final song 'Dust In Your Eyes' Redrum made the Rock City crowd go wild. Bormann proved to be an outstanding entertainer and singer whilst Redrum as a band proved to be true Hard Rock quality with solid, authentic, good song-writing and of course shed loads of hair! (JB)

Set-list: One Of Us (Scream) / You Can't Buy No Hero / Thirsty For Love / Judgement Day / Heart To Heart / Dust In Your Eyes

Sweden's **CIRCUS MAXIMUS** are a tight, powerful and incredibly talented five-piece and had me entranced right from their intro following which the band opened up by hitting everyone with a breathtakingly heavy rendition of 'Architect Of Fortune' where the guitars, keyboards and vocals of Mats Haugen, Lasse Finbraten and Michael Eriksen combined together to create a sumptuous Melodic Metal blanket that enveloped the audience until the song hit its blistering crescendo. 'Namaste' was next and was greeted with a big cheer from the crowd and the many in attendance sang along to every word, which simply encouraged the band to raise their game. Large grins spread across their faces as they were welcomed into the Firefest Family.

'I Am' was more of the band's glorious power and melody honed to a diamond hard point and was followed by 'The One'. This Progressive Metal band again revealed that just because their music is of a heavier nature than most Firefest bands, they did not lose melodic sensibilities and could shoehorn many harmonies into their songs; harmonies that would put most AOR bands to shame. Eriksen was in his element and loved the crowd's reaction and the rest of the band also basked in the Firefest aura. 'Arrival Of Love' and 'Game Of Life' came next and CM played out of their skins during both; Haugen showed all in attendance just what a wonderful guitar player he is. Right behind me were a group of fans who sang so loudly that they almost drowned out the band and when I looked at their faces, all I could see were big smiles.

Finally im my opinion one of the best songs written in recent years: namely the melodic perfection that is 'Last Goodbye'. The slow guitar and keyboard intro was soon superseded by the wonderful lead

guitar work of Haugen, which was then joined by Eriksen's plaintive and soulful vocals which reached their climax during one of the most intense, melodic and hook-filled choruses I've heard in years. It was spine tingling perfection and the way the keyboard outro kept playing as the band left the stage to huge approbation was a truly classy way for a band to exit the stage. (IJ)

Set-list: Architect of Fortune / Namaste / I Am / The One / Arrival of Love / Game of Life / Last Goodbye

I must admit I'd consigned **SHY** to the pile of bands I would never see again (especially following the tragic death of guitarist Steve Harris and also due to the fact long-time front-man Tony Mills did not take part in the creation of the bands last album in 2011), so I was pleasantly surprised when they were included in this year's line-up. They took part in Firefest II back in 2005 and I remember at the time being rather underwhelmed so I was hoping for something special from this appearance.

The first thing I noticed when the band took to the stage was that the room was pretty much full, even though it was only mid-afternoon; clearly Shy are still held in high regard by many despite long periods of inactivity. 'Skydiving' was a great song with an infectious hook and, despite one or two sounds issues, highlighted Harris's knack for crafting memorable melodies. The set concentrated on the 1987 release 'Excess All Areas' and also picked some other favourites from the more recent extensive back catalogue. 'Telephone', 'Can't Fight The Nights' and 'Emergency' transported everyone back to their favourite 1980's Rock club dance floor and I was reminded how long it had been since I actually played some of my Shy albums.

I can forgive some of Mills vocal inadequacies because of the sheer enjoyment of seeing the band play live again. Guitarists Neil Hibbs and Carl Anthony Wright obviously have big shoes to fill but I thought that today was all about the songs. Original bass player and drummer Bob Richards remained from of the band's more recent line-ups and the sound was bolstered by keyboard player Joe Basketts. Everyone seemed to be having a great time on stage, possibly due to the realisation that it could be the last time. 'When The Love Is Over' was the only real ballad in the set and its emotion was felt throughout the whole crowd. Mills encouraged audience participation at every opportunity, another sign that he may have been struggling with some of the higher register moments. The smooth 'Breakaway' was followed by the riffy Dokken-esque 'Break Down The Walls' before the show was brought to a close by the lengthy 'No Other Way'. This gave Hibbs and Wright a chance to shine during a series of solo spots towards the conclusion of the song.

I have to admit that the performance was a little loose at times, as though slightly under-rehearsed, but on the whole I really enjoyed it. I have seen Shy a number of times, both during their 1980's heyday and also in recent times, but I don't think I have seen a better reception; proof indeed that they will be missed. (DB)

Set-list: Skydiving / Telephone / Can't Fight The Nights / Emergency / Give It All You Got / When The Love Is Over / Breakaway / Break Down The Walls / No Other Way

Fifth band of the day, **THE POODLES**, had the unenviable task of following Shy, twenty or so minutes after the crowd had very nearly taken the roof off of Nottingham Rock City.

But in ex-Talisman drummer Jacob Samuel they have the consummate front-man. He strode out onto the stage as 'Misery Loves Company' (from last year's 'Tour De Force' album) played out, he looked every inch the showman a la Gary Cherone; bedecked in bowler hat, leather waistcoat and chequered strides, he had the air of a Rock star who had the crowd on his side. As Henrik Bergqvist played the familiar opening riffs to 'Metal Will Stand Tall', the Firefest audience had already got the party started for these highly anticipated Swedes as the front few rows got into the swing of things and lapped up the Samuel's cool vibes as he swaggered about all hips and lithe movements as he interacted with the grinning Bergqvist and stand-in bassist Oskar Soderman (Pontus Edberg having left in September) who laid down some mean bottom end.

Of course sticks-man Christian Lundqvist wasn't going to be left out and he made his presence known with some serious hard hitting as 'Cuts Like A Knife' from 'Performocracy' was given an airing. As I looked around the auditorium, it was clear very few people had taken their customary dash out for food so TP were playing to pretty much to a full house. For a large number in the audience, this was their first encounter of a live Poodles show and the boys from Stockholm didn't disappoint.

The 'Clash Of The Elements' album from five years ago was represented with 'Like No Tomorrow' and with a great sound and light show that emanated from the stage, TP had the Firefest crowd right where they wanted them. It had turned into a triumph for the Norse men but when you have the songs and a front-man like Samuel who's been around long enough to know how to work a crowd (and this crowd gave everything back), it all seemed rather easy to deliver a performance that was both captivating and genuinely easy on the ear. 'Night Of Passion' (again from their breakthrough '...Tall' and Melodifestivalen entry back in 2006) was another familiar tune that had the crowd Rocking and with a rhythm section that was as tight as Samuel's trousers and a guitarist that ripped out riff after riff without being flashy, it was clear that TP had done more than enough to earn themselves glowing plaudits from critics and fans alike. Like all the bands before them, the final ovation as 'Caroline' wrapped up proceedings had The Poodles showing the kind of appreciation back that the Firefest audience always shows to the bands who give of their best. Metal was certainly standing tall for these Swedes. (CB)

Set-list: Misery Loves Company / Metal Will Stand Tall / Cuts Like a Knife / Shut Up! / Like No Tomorrow / Seven Seas / Night Of Passion / Caroline

Swiftly approaching their 20th anniversary, **TEN** have unquestionably cemented their place in the pantheon of Melodic Rock by continually producing a unique brand of hard-edged Rock suffused in melody, with poetical lyrics that quite frankly can rouse your spirit, massage your soul, or simply take you to fantastical places you can only ever dream of. Sadly however, for reasons often beyond their control, the status quo surrounding Ten has always

been challenged; guitar wizard Dan Mitchell having now departed, but in his place have come not one, but two unknown, yet highly proficient axe-men, Dann Rosingana and Steve Grocott; 'Firefest – The Final Fling' was to be their first foray into the spotlight... no pressure then! There was also the small matter of introducing and promoting the band's brand new opus 'Albion', the well documented debut album for Rocktopia Records, which was ceremoniously unveiled to the fortunate few at a Listening Party the previous evening.

As the lights dimmed, the only spaces on the floor were ones temporarily vacated by those with weak bladders or just the downright starving! Following a short atmospheric intro, which included a patriotic nod to 'Remembrance For The Brave', the curtain fell to reveal a band that was clearly happy and honoured to be there, and they definitely looked up for it!!

'Fear The Force' couldn't be faulted as an opener, and the live sound of Ten these days gave it a rumbling, bluesy makeover that was almost unrecognizable initially, but it soon blossomed into the rocker that is widely known and loved. Prior to the performance, many were wondering how the band would function with seven members now embedded in the line-up. Well, Gary Hughes must have consulted with Jose Mourinho, as a flexible 1-2-3-1 formation was implemented; Max Yates technically excelled between the sticks (oops, I meant with the sticks); Darrel Treece-Birch and Steve McKenna shored up the rearguard allowing the two debutants space on the flanks to weave their magic; Ten anchorman, John Halliwell expertly linked the two with his ever-proficient demeanour and experience; this left one upfront ... and he was having a ball!!

'Spellbound' maintained the offensive attack and drove the proverbial hammer down even further. 'The Robe' followed ... a fans favourite that never fails to mesmerise with its mid-song incantations that sent shivers down the spine. A surprise addition to the set was 'Apparition'; a masterstroke that proved an extra guitarist was fully justified as yet again Rosingana and Grocott expertly harmonised chords by playing varying inversions, thus creating a contrasting tonal overlay. Having whipped the crowd into a sing-along frenzy, the first of three songs from 'Albion' was introduced; despite its unknown quantity 'Battlefield' went down well, and the quality of the chorus soon made ignorance futile. 'The Lights Go Down' is a personal favourite, and by the reaction around the venue it's a song that should never be omitted. 'It's Alive', the second newbie off 'Albion' instantly impressed and encapsulated Ten's prowess in delivering classic AOR. Hughes, in my opinion, is king of the ballads and the evocative keyboard intro of 'Valentine' was met with screams and whoops of joy that quickly changed to emotional wonderment as it slowly built to its heart-wrenching crescendo. Some songs cannot be omitted, and 'After The Love Has Gone' quickly picked up the tempo again and worked its timeless magic. The final song showcasing 'Albion', 'Alone In The Dark Tonight', was being filmed for a forthcoming rockumentary, and again, the audience appeared suitably impressed and (encouraged by Hughes) immersed themselves in potential stardom.

The band seamlessly switched to an attacking 1-2-4 formation for the final flourish; the Celtic rebel-rouser that is 'Red' followed by 'Name Of The Rose' which pummelled the masses into delirious

submission and whether you love them or hate them, you couldn't be anything but impressed. Never say goodbye!! (DC)

Set-list: Intro (Remembrance For The Brave) / Fear The Force / Spellbound / The Robe / Apparition / Battlefield / The Lights Go Down / It's Alive / Valentine / After The Love Has Gone / Alone In The Dark Tonight / Red / Name Of The Rose

The history of **H.e.a.t** will forever be linked with Firefest as regular attendees have watched them develop and graduate from virtual unknowns; with each subsequent visit they've climbed the running order to become bona fide headliners in their own right and it was perhaps fitting that they therefore topped the bill on one of the days of 'The Final Fling'. On the Friday night they had to follow what, in my opinion, was one of the strongest, most consistently good day seen at any Firefest yet they took the event by the scruff of the neck and delivered a quite stunning performance; not that there was very much doubt if anyone had seen them on tour earlier in the year.

Despite vocalist Erik Grönwall suffering with a cold, that didn't hamper his style one iota and he was his usual hyperactive, demonic self while the rest of the band members were also on top form and they gave their all; you never get anything less than 100% with these guys. After the rather lengthy intro of Glenn Frey's 'The Heat Is On', H.e.a.t hit the stage and burst into the superb 'Point Of No Return' (a truly great set opener) which was immediately followed by the equally electrifying 'Shot Of Redemption' both thereby setting the tone for what was to follow, one sure fire crowd pleaser after another. For such young guys, they certainly knew how to deliver and structure a top quality show: all substance, no fluff, fatuous solos, messing about or too much talking. They just kept delivering great songs with infectious melodies and memorable choruses that simply invited the crowd to join in and respond. Watching from the balcony, it was obvious that H.e.a.t had the audience in the palm of their hands from the moment they hit the stage.

From such a strong set it's difficult to select highlights, as I could name every song (I have no doubt everyone in the audience will have their own nominations) but for me 'Tearing Down The Walls' and the delicious ballad, 'All The Nights' were right up there. If anyone ever doubted Grönwall's vocal abilities, then the latter song would have squashed those flat as he excelled and sang with passion over Jona Tee's delightful piano refrain.

I'm usually against bands playing covers at Firefest but I forgave H.e.a.t on this occasion as there's an emotional tie between them and the late, great Jimi Jamison; the band having performed as part of his backing band. Their rendition of 'Rebel Son' was both fitting and done with great panache; as was the injection of a snippet of Deep Purple's 'Highway Star' into 'Beg Beg Beg'.

As usual Crash and Jimmy Jay were an exceptional rhythm unit and Eric Rivers dished out the riffs and solos in crowd-pleasing style.

These boys believe in going out with a bang and the closing triumvirate of 'Enemy In Me', 'Emergency' and the deserved encore 'Living On The Run' certainly did just that. The roar of appreciation that rose from the audience as they took their bows told you everything you needed to know; they'd not been good, they'd been fantastic. They came, they saw, they conquered. No question! (GM)

Set-list: Point of No Return / Shot of Redemption / Better Off Alone / Heartbreaker / It's All About Tonight / Inferno / Tearing Down the Walls / Mannequin Show / Late Night Lady / In and Out of Trouble / Beg Beg Beg / Highway Star / Keyboard solo / All The Nights / Downtown / Rebel Son / Enemy in Me / Emergency / Encore - Living on the Run

DAY 2 – Sat 25th October 2014

Some people think that being the first band of the day can be a disadvantage; an early start, not everybody will be in the venue, the sound levels won't be set correctly etc. Yet the first band of each day actually got a sound-check, so when **RAGE OF ANGELS** opened their set with the dramatic 'Dreamworld', the sound quality was absolutely perfect. This allowed the dynamics of ROA's music to be clearly detectable.

The mastermind behind Rage Of Angels is former Ten keyboardist Ged Rylands and it's obvious that Rylands' epic style of writing has partly been influenced by his former employer Gary Hughes. Rylands (rhythm guitar) has put together an excellent band to bring the stunning 'Dreamworld' album to the live stage. The band included guitarist Neil Fraser (ex-Ten), keyboardist Irvin Parratt (Lost Weekend), bassist Gavin Cooper and drummer Joao Colaco. ROA's regular vocalist recently stepped down from his role, so Rick Chase (Mama's Boys, Double Cross, Alibi) was drafted in for this performance and it's to his credit that he put in a sterling performance at short notice, and with no rehearsal! 'Dreamworld' features a number of guest vocalists, yet Chase managed to emulate the vocal parts of the diverse likes of Matt Alfonzetti, Harry Hess, Robert Hart, Danny Vaughn and Ralf Scheepers seamlessly, while putting his own stamp on the material. All this was complemented by the excellent vocal harmonies of Rylands, Fraser and Parratt.

Following the powerful opener, ROA headed into more commercial territory with the wonderful 'See You Walking By' where Colaco proved to be as significant visually as he was rhythmically with his expressive style, while Neil Fraser demonstrated his talent with some searing fret-work. 'Falling' and 'Through It All' followed, both slightly heavier, riff-driven songs that still brimmed with melody and featured impressively tight performances for a band that didn't actually have that many live shows previously.

The lengthy material meant only six songs from 'Dreamworld' could be aired in a forty minute set, and as a huge Tyketto fan (of which Rylands is now of course a member) it was to my delight that it happened to be the two Vaughn-fronted numbers that closed their set. The awesome 'Over And Over' was a perfect Melodic Rock anthem that drew a warm response from the ever-increasing audience, then legendary guitarist and Firefest regular Tommy Denander was introduced for final song 'Spinnin' Wheel'. This brought even more kudos to an already impressive set with the Swede trading Bluesy licks with Fraser while Rylands laid down the chugging riff.

A great performance and perfect way to start the second day, Rage Of Angels certainly made a lasting impression. (AH)

Set-list: Dreamworld / See You Walking By / Falling / Through It All / Over And Over / Spinnin' Wheel

When **FROM THE FIRE** hit the stage I, along with many in the crowd, had waited almost twenty-five years to see this wonderful band. From the moment they started with 'Hold On', you could immediately see that this meant so much to them; Tommy Lafferty, Michael Sciotto, the legendary John McCoy and the happiest man ever to attend a Firefest, J.D. Kelly, looked stunned at the immediate and enthusiastic audience reaction as they played and from then onwards, they could do little wrong.

The superb 'Same Song' followed that amazing start and the band looked like they were having a blast, Lafferty has still got all the chops and Kelly's voice sounded as good as ever and I soon found myself singing along with the crowd to every word and felt those twenty odd years melt away. Next came 'Tears Cried In The Rain' and again the band looked like they couldn't believe the Firefest audience response while the musicianship during this song was amazing. It was also astounding to be told later by Lafferty and Sciotto that this was a band that played with little or no rehearsal time and they only met up with John McCoy on the day!

Catchy 'Over Your Head' was next and I think that was where I lost my voice (those who spoke to me after FTF's set will know what I mean) as I sang my heart out as they roared through this fantastic song. 'In Your Dreams' (from new album 'Evil Men Do') followed and fitted so well with the older material, with its sophisticated hook and strong harmony vocals: a song that is certain to be a future fan favourite. Then the song that everyone had been waiting for arrived (Thank You Steve Price/ARFM for helping to get the band to do this one)...'Spark And Flame'. This male/female duet looked in doubt until Issa Oversveen was asked to help out and it turned out to be possibly the song of the weekend for me. The vocal interplay between Kelly and Issa was amazing and the Firefest choir were in full voice as the band played up a storm; it was chills all over again as this one was performed.

The stunning set continued with another new song in the shape of 'Blame It On The Moon' - a nice ballad where Kelly showed us again just what a great singer he is. Then finally, in a much too short a set, FTF gave the Firefest faithful a rousing rendition of 'Where Are You Now' which clearly demonstrated this lot deserved a chance at greatness because along with everyone at Rock City, I was in the process of witnessing one of the great Firefest sets. After they closed out with 'Where Are You Now', the band wallowed in deafening applause. For me, a personal Firefest highlight and a set that will live long in the memory. (IJ)

Set-list: Hold On / Same Song / Tears Cried In The Rain / Over Your Head / In Your Dreams / Spark And Flame / Blame It On The Moon / Where Are You Now?

This is what Firefest was all about, seeing legendary groups from yesteryear that you never

thought, in a million years, you would ever get to see perform live in the U.K. At the mid-point of Saturday afternoon, the six original members of **BOULEVARD** strolled on to the Rock City stage and opened with the glorious 'Dream On'. The sound was perfect from the start and all that was left was for David Forbes to step up to the microphone. What followed was a Jim Jidhed (Alien) moment; after twenty-four years (now a fire fighter in Washington state) Forbes still possessed the magnificent pipes that graced the two outstanding AOR albums that the Canadians released in 1988 and 1990 respectively.

It was just left for the Firefest faithful to revel in the next fifty minutes of near perfect AOR. It was hard to believe that this group had not performed live in over twenty years, so tight was their performance. 'Western Skies', also from the awesome 1988 debut album, continued the show and resulted in many in the crowd needing to pick their jaws off the floor!

Ten days before Firefest, I suffered the unexpected and sad loss of my dad who was a huge Jazz fan so the image of Mark Holden's saxophone and the playing of one of my all-time favourite Boulevard songs ('Lead Me On') had me reduced to tears; however, these were tears of joy! How great it was to see a saxophone player taking such a prominent position in a Rock band. Forbes introduced the awesome 'Need You Tonight', jokingly, as "here is another one from our latest album" (1990's 'Into The Street').

'Where Are You Now' was pure AOR heaven (as all the songs were) and featured the understated David Corman on lead guitar. The rhythm section of Randall Stoll on drums and Tom Christiansen on bass were also low key but kept the band right on track throughout their fifty minute set.

I thought that they were brave to tackle 'Missing Persons' with its huge chorus, however, Andrew Johns handled the backing vocals pretty convincingly. The keyboard player even donned a wig half way through the set as he (like several of the band members) did not have the same head of hair that graced the covers of their brilliant albums.

Forbes said that they had waited thirty years to play 'Rainy Day In London', the first ever Boulevard song. 'Far From Over' sent shivers running down my spine and 'Crazy Life' saw a large contingent of the Firefest crew watching on from the side of the stage. 'Never Give Up' brought the amazing set to an all too abrupt end.

The ovation bestowed on Boulevard at the end of their set was very fitting and the band, from Calgary, were obviously emotionally moved by the crowd reaction having delivered, arguably, and in my humble opinion, the performance of the weekend. (MD)

Set-list: Dream On / Western Skies / Lead Me On / Need You Tonight / Where Are You Now / Missing Persons / Rainy Day In London / Far From Over / Crazy Life / Never Give Up

Despite the unquestionable quality of the three bands that started Firefest Saturday, my personal tastes tend to drift in a heavier direction these days so **BABYLON A.D.**'s brand of Raucous Roll were the perfect way to kick things into a more energetic gear. I hadn't really followed them since the 1989 debut and follow up 'Nothing Sacred' from 1992 so I was hoping their set would lean more towards those two

releases.... and I wasn't disappointed.

From the opening 'Back In Babylon', it was clear that although they are not active all year round, but we were observing a seasoned and well-rehearsed outfit. Last year I was unlucky enough to be tasked with reviewing Baton Rouge (another U.S. band that appeared at the tail end of the 1980s) and I must admit I was brought a degree of trepidation into my expectations for Babylon A.D. Fortunately my fears were unfounded because for the next hour we were given a high-class lesson in Hard Rock and treated to a set of songs that did not appear out of time despite being twenty-five years old.

'When The Hammer Swings Down', 'Shot O' Love' and 'Bad Blood' all had great energy and lead-singer Derek Davis sounded no different than he did when I first heard him. The ballad 'So Savage The Heart' was incredibly atmospheric and though the emotional mood was changed, there was no noticeable dip in the interest levels of the crowd. Guitarists Dan De La Rosa and Ron Freschi swapped solos and riffs in a seamless fashion and the good mix also highlighted the tight rhythm section of Robb Reid (bass) and Jamey Pacheco (drums).

'Maryanne' saw a return to a more up-tempo style and the popular 'Bang Go The Bells' was greeted like a Melodic Rock classic. If there had been a dance floor close by, I can guarantee it would have been packed. The sound was good throughout the set and everyone looked to be having fun. When Davis strapped on an acoustic guitar I knew that the power and passion of 'Desperate' was due next. This song is a personal favourite of mine and it was given the perfect treatment. 'Sally Danced' had a Bluesy swagger whilst 'The Kid Goes Wild' had a ballsy, strut. Aerosmith's 'Rats In The Cellar' then brought things to a frantically entertaining conclusion. Though appearances may change, great songs will always be great songs and alongside a thoroughly professional performance, that was the main feature of the band's time on stage. (DB)

Set-list: Back In Babylon / When The Hammer Swings Down / Shot O' Love / Bad Blood / So Savage The Heart / Maryanne / Loveline / Bang Go The Bells / Sally Danced / Desperate / The Kid Goes Wild / Rats In The Cellar

PRETTY MAIDS were asked to play for the second time at Firefest having first performed in 2010 when they had the unenviable task, following travel delays, of taking the stage after the one and only Jimi Jamison, who had just put on, the largely acknowledged, best ever show in the history of the festival. That evening they put on a great show and anyone who has seen them live since (or their 'It Comes Alive: Live In Switzerland' DVD) knew that they would not be daunted by following the impressive sets of the bands preceding them.

My only criticism of their whole show would be the overlong intro which surely should have been sacrificed for the addition of another song. Once the aforementioned intro had finally completed, the band fired out onto the stage with an opening, no holds barred, go for the throat salvo of 'Mother Of All Lies' and 'Nuclear Boomerang'; the latter taken from the aptly titled album 'Louder Than Ever'. The sound was incredibly loud but did settle down and improved quality wise for the more melodic, mid-set numbers. With such a large and impressive back-catalogue, it was always going to be interesting to hear the band's song choices for this event; they bookended their set with Melodic Metal and included many of their Melodic Rock/AOR gems in between. 'Love Games' from the 1987 classic 'Future World' was the first of the more melodic numbers followed by the new song 'My Soul To Take', from this year's 'Louder...' album; that was a real set highlight.

The Maids are like a well polished machine and while only containing two original members now, vocalist Ronnie Atkins and guitarist Ken Hammer, they are arguably putting out even stronger albums and performing better than ever on the live stage. Rene Shades ran Erik Grönwall (H.e.a.t) close for the musician that covered the most ground whilst on stage and you had to be mighty quick when trying to capture a photograph of the bassist.

A cover of Pink Floyd's 'Another Brick In The Wall' provided the intro to the classic 'I.N.V.U.' which is one of my personal Melodic Rock favourites from the new Millennium. The rip-roaring 'I See Ghosts' kept up the momentum and Atkins really got to exhibit the emotional part of his voice with the incredible 'Sad To See You Suffer'. His range is quite incredible, having the ability to peel paint off the walls one minute then delivering beautiful, emotional ballads the next. The AOR of 'Rodeo' and crowd favourite 'Little Drops Of Heaven' preceded the ballad 'Please Don't Leave Me' that once again saw the Firefest Choir in full voice. There was sadly only time for one more number and the Maids were not going to go out quietly; cue 'Future World' which was an all out assault on the senses.

I, like many, had really been looking forward to seeing these great Danes perform again at Firefest and they certainly did not disappoint. (MD)

Set-list: Mother Of All Lies / Nuclear Boomerang / Love Games / My Soul To Take / I.N.V.U. / I See Ghosts / Sad To See You Suffer / Rodeo / Little Drops Of Heaven / Please Don't Leave Me / Future World

To say that Portland, Oregan's **BLACK 'N BLUE** were overdue a visit to the UK was a bit of an understatement, their last time here was as support to Whitesnake on their 1984 'Slide It In' tour; the U.S. quintet were promoting their Dieter Dierks-produced debut LP at the time. Thirty years later and they still had three original members in drummer Pete Holmes, bassist Patrick Young and singer Jaime St James, but joined by guitarist Brandon Cook (who replaced Jeff Warner a year ago) and ex-L.A. Guns six-stringer Stacey Blades (filling in for the unavailable Shawn Sonnenschein, who himself had been covering Tommy Thayer's position since the original axe-man

got the job in Kiss).

Thankfully the knowledgeable Firefest crowd had long memories and age hadn't dulled the image or energy of St James and the band as they came out to the familiar riff of 'Get Wise To The Rise', amid a dazzling light show that only added greatly to the spectacle and sense of occasion. There were a few rough edges during 'Stop The Lightning', a personal favourite that was aired before the mix began to favour St. James' vocals, but it showed just how important Patrick Young's backing vocals were to the choruses of the more melodic tunes. The band celebrated their thirty years of recording with a majority of their timeless debut, the breathless 'Autoblast' blurred the boundaries of Rock and Metal before the excellent 'Rockin' On Heaven's Door' heated things up with its speeded up instrumental section and dual guitar solos. The straight ahead 'Nasty Nasty' was the only song from the album of the same name and things got a bit more tuneful with the mellower 'Miss Mystery'.

Seeming a little less tight than my last encounter with them eighteen months ago, Cook seemed the more confident of the guitarists while Blades had a looser style that I wasn't sure fitted the bill, particularly on 'Chains Around Heaven', but he did the job on the only song here not from the eighties: 'Target' from their latest 'Hell Yeah!' release. However, the band pulled it together on a salvo of tracks at the end that celebrated their youth: the anthemic 'The Strong Will Rock' and a rocking 'Wicked Bitch' – complete with an intro from Blades – topped only by the classic duo of 'School Of Hard Knocks' and 'Hold On To 18', the two highlights of the set.

Strangely the band thought they were out of time but were ushered back on for a raucous 'I'm The King', and despite some dodgy vocal moments and a less than perfect sound at the beginning, Black 'N Blue did their reputation no harm at all. (PA)

Set-list: Get Wise To The Rise / Stop The Lightning / Autoblast / Rockin' On Heaven's Door / Nasty Nasty / Miss Mystery / Chains Around Heaven / Target / The Strong Will Rock / Wicked Bitch / School Of Hard Knocks / Hold On To 18 / I'm The King

North Carolina's **FIREHOUSE** are one of the few bands of our beloved Melodic Rock genre that actually managed to stay together and ride out the Grunge years with some degree of success. Remaining a regular touring entity (throughout the U.S.A. and Asia) has resulted in them being a slick live band, though it's been eleven years since their last proper studio album 'Prime Time'. So as they were at the very first Firefest it seemed appropriate that they should return for 'The Final Fling' and making their third appearance. However it was very much a set of peaks and troughs.

Billed as "Performing 'Firehouse' and The Hits", it was expected that we would get the entire classic debut album (which admittedly makes up the bulk of their live set anyway) with a few other select choices. However, it seemed that Firehouse had other ideas and delivered a set that appeared rather self-indulgent – it would have made a great set at a regular Firehouse show, but as a Festival headlining slot it left a lot to be desired.

I'd expected 'Rock On The Radio' to kick things off as it does on the debut album, but instead we got 'Shake & Tumble' – fair enough, they were shaking up the order a little. This was followed by the ever popular 'All She Wrote' which ensured a mass audience sing-along, but then they shifted into 'You're Too Bad' from sophomore release 'Hold Your Fire' – a good song, but not an obvious choice. '…Radio' was welcomed next, but then guitarist Bill Leverty took centre stage for a short-ish (albeit decent) solo spot before performing lead vocals on 'Holding On' from the '...Time' album; another somewhat odd selection. Vocalist CJ Snare headed to his keyboards for the first time for the hit ballad 'When I Look Into Your Eyes' that redressed the balance, but then it was back to '...Time' for 'Door To Door' – a great up-tempo song where drummer Michael Foster took lead vocals, but it was marred by a completely unnecessary drum solo and over-long finishing section. The crowd that was packed out at the start of the set had, by now, thinned considerably (at least around my vantage point by the mixing desk) amid murmurings of Firehouse being "flat" and "dull". I'm a long-term fan, but I have to admit I agreed. 'Hold Your Fire', the Bluesy 'Don't Walk Away' (the one deeper cut from the debut), and 'Trying To Make A Living' (the latter featuring an extended keyboard and guitar workout in its midst) unfortunately offered little inspiration and came across as more filler than killer, the applause seemed more respectful than rapturous.

Thankfully Firehouse went all-out and trotted out the big guns for the big finish; 'Overnight Sensation', the mega-ballad 'Love Of A Lifetime' that inspired much smooching in the audience, with the set rescued by the mighty 'Reach For The Sky' and 'Don't Treat Me Bad', but for some it was a case of too little too late.

Friday night's headliners H.e.a.t demonstrated how to do a great, straight-to-the-point no-frills headline show, but Firehouse fell short of expectations. If only they had stuck to the agreed "entire debut album set", things could have been considerably different. So no 'Helpless' or 'Home Is Where The Heart Is', let alone 'Oughta Be A Law' or 'Lover's Lane'. Firehouse at Firefest 2014 certainly left me wanting more – but not necessarily in a good way. (AH)

Set-list: Shake & Tumble / All She Wrote / You're Too Bad / Rock On The Radio / Holding On / When I Look Into Your Eyes / Dorr To Door / Hold Your Fire / Don't Walk Away / Trying To Make A Living / Overnight Sensation / Love Of A Lifetime / Reach For The Sky / Don't Treat Me Bad

DAY 3 – Sun 26th October 2014

The last ever Firefest day was opened by a band several fans and crew-members were thinking of in (a bit of) an ambivalent way since **AXXIS** had neither ever played Firefest before nor did they seem an obvious choice for every Melodic Rock fan despite lead-singer Bernhard Weiss's extraordinary voice. Furthermore the band had never followed any rules, having implemented a wide variety of musical influences within their discography. However, nowadays they're going stronger than ever and that's just what they undoubtedly proved as the opening act for Firefest Sunday.

When the last day finally began, the crowd was hot to Rock when the first song 'Kingdom Of The Night Part II' rolled forth from the speakers and Weiss delivered a notable and highly energetic performance. At first he appeared to be a little nervous and it took him a short while to get his voice under control and therefore failed to demonstrate his full potential right from the beginning. But being Weiss, a man with a fantastic sense of humor, he just blamed the hearty English breakfast he had eaten that morning!

By the time the second number ('Little War') was introduced, the band must have found the Nitro injection button as they danced and jumped around energetically! The dark and dirty sounding 'Heavy Rain' (from the album 'Utopia') was next and guitarist Marco Wriedt's fingers danced over the fret-board like it was just such a natural thing to do. 'Hall Of Fame' delivered the unambiguous statement that Rock 'n' Roll is anything but dead; heads banged and hands rose all over the place to a heavy sounding, catchy song that had been released earlier in the year. Meanwhile, Bass player Rob Schomaker and keyboardist Harry Oellers proved that the choice of their instruments surely doesn't force them to remain at the back of the stage.

When the band started to play good old 'Heaven In Black', I was unsure where all those people had suddenly come from; all at once the venue was packed. The message that AXXIS were tearing it up must have spread like a wildfire amongst those who stood outside. The upbeat and need-to-sing-sing-along tracks 'Little Look Back' and 'Living In A World' implied two more highly welcomed AXXIS evergreens to their very well structured set-list. They finished their show with 'Kingdom Of The Night' where they once again gathered all their electrifying energy, their musical brilliance and their passion to create a huge anticipation amongst the audience for the rest of the Final Fling. (JB)

Set-list: Kingdom Of The Night PII / Little War / Heavy Rain / Hall Of Fame / Heaven In Black / Little Look Back / Living In A World / Kingdom Of The Night

Early on Sunday afternoon, the Firefest crowd expectantly waited for **GUILD OF AGES** to take to the stage...and when they did, our jaws were well a truly nailed to the (VERY Sticky) Rock City floor! This was because the band played one of the tightest, hardest and most professional Firefest sets I've ever had the pleasure to witness over the next forty five minutes.. Messrs Martinez, Trujillo, Lostetter and Stuntz (with very little between song banter) just played up a storm and what blew me away the most was the amount of Firefest fans who sang along with every single one of the songs.

They started with a short intro but then it was straight into 'Stand Or Fall' and 'From Now On' and the years for them and us just ebbed away. 'Say A Prayer' and 'Heat Of Emotion' continued this heavy but wonderfully Melodic set, where the whole band grinned like crazy as they hit their stride. 'Life Goes On' followed but as good as this song was performed, it was only a prelude to one of my and definitely the crowds "top weekend moments"; namely the sing-a-long moment that is 'Silent Soldiers'. Catchy and powerful in equal measure 'SS' had the whole of Rock City singing along and you could see by the looks on the faces of the band that they were blown away by this reaction.

'Relapse Of Reason' trundled along next and again the powerful guitars of Trujillo and Martinez combined to create a battering ram of Melodic riffs, that soon threatened to tear the happy faces off the

loyal Firefest crowd. The time simply flew by and sadly only two songs remained: firstly the brooding 'Everytime (I Close My Eyes)' where Martinez's hard hitting vocals threatened to take the roof off the venue itself and as the rest of GOA played up a blinder; and finally what could well be considered GOA's signature song, 'Through The Years'. As soon as the riff started, I watched as the whole audience bounced up and down and sang every single word with joy and happiness in their collective voices. The band Rocked the song to its glorious finale and when the final strains had finished they left the stage to a rapturous response.

Guild Of Ages were the last band I'd ever review at a Firefest but what a way to end: one hell of a set, one hell of a band! (IJ)

Set-list: Intro / Stand Or Fall / From Now On / Say A Prayer / Heat Of Emotion / Life Goes On / Silent Soldiers / Relapse Of Reason / Everytime (I Close My Eyes) / Through The Years

Now this was what the Firefest was all about; bringing together bands whom you thought you'd never ever have the chance of seeing live. **TOUCH**'s only album (although a subsequent second album that wasn't originally released is now available) came out back in 1980 and was a bonafide AOR classic that still sounds immense today. There were some comments suggesting that it wasn't really Touch as only the band's lynchpin, Mark Mangold, remains. The rest of the band was made up of some of AOR's best "go to" musicians; after all it wouldn't be Firefest without an appearance (his second of the Festival) from guitarist Tommy Denander who was on hand to add faithful guitar parts. Pontus Engborg of Legends was on drums and Alien bassist Ken Sandin supplied not only the bottom end but some good harmony vocals as well; however a lot hinged on Goran Edman's vocals. A singer who has popped up on so many records it's hard to keep track, but here at his first Firefest he demonstrated what a great vocalist he is. While he lacked the more flamboyant showmanship of many of the front-men, it didn't matter when he delivered some vein- popping vocals. Mangold's keyboard work was so integral to Touch's sound (as well as being the writer of the songs) that he was actually the only original member needed. Mangold looked untouched by time, lean and healthy in an all-American way.

They kicked off with 'Black Star' and Touch upped the Pomp factor of the festival with Mangold's up-front keyboards. He promised the crowd the band would do the "Donnington songs" which alluded to their previous, historic performance at the inaugural Donnington festival back in 1980 (for those with long memories).'Take Me Back' and 'When The Spirit Move You' were early highlights. Mangold took the lead vocal on 'So High' and just as it seemed the momentum might be slowing down, Denander teased the crowd (and looked like he had surprised the band) by giving a snatch of the riff for 'Don't You Know What Love Is?' The song, an AOR treasure, should have been a massive global hit. Edman attempted to get the crowd singing along but so infectious was the chorus that the crowd picked it up themselves and he didn't need to coax them. Mangold showed off some of his impressive keyboard skills on the Pomptastic 'Why Life Depends On You' before it all finished way too soon with the Rocking, Bluesy throb of 'Fire Never Dies' (a new track apparently written for this occasion) which again the crowd sang along to.

This was real, wonderfully authentic AOR. There were moments that you were aware that perhaps they hadn't had so long to rehearse, and it was also their first performance together but the pedigree of the musicians was good enough to cover up any cracks. What it might have lacked in flash, it made up for in glorious hooks and expert song-craft that belonged to a halcyon bygone era. For those who miss those days, this was one of the weekend's highlights. Bands like H.e.a.t will survive without Firefest but it's unlikely we'll see performances by the likes of Boulevard and Touch on these shores again. That's why there were so many tears during the evening's finale. (DJ)

Set-list: Listen / Black Star / Take It Back / When The Spirit Moves You / So High / Don't You Know What Love Is? / My Life / Fire Never Dies

BROTHER FIRETRIBE were scheduled bang in the middle of the seven band bill in a decent mid-afternoon slot where the crowd had been nicely warmed up by all the preceding acts including a very well received performance from GOA. Hotly anticipated by many, including yours truly for the fact that Nightwish guitarist Emppu Vuorinen is the riff-meister for these Finnish wonderlings, they also have enough melody and bombastic thrust to stir up many a campfire sing-along in the forests of the Northern hemisphere.

In Pekka Heino they have a charismatic and visually appealing front-man with a voice that resonates with all the AOR and Melodic Rock aficionados, and although they're more steel as opposed to silk, thanks to Vuorinen's fluid metallic delivery and a more than capable heavy rhythm section of bass-man Jason Flinck and stand-in drummer Hannes Pirila (Kalle Torniainen unfortunately didn't travel over), they never-the-less appeal to a wide cross-section of Hard Rock and Metal fans.

'One Single Breath' opened proceedings and they sounded glorious. Vuorinen grinned away as he so normally does as he fired off riff after riff from his purple ESP signature guitar. Heino prowled the stage as he traded a vocal performance that was every inch as measured and precise whilst the melody flowed from Tomi Nikulainen's keyboard with consummate ease. The familiar 'Runaways' was next up and the Firefest audience sang along in unison. Airing a new song so soon into a set showed this band have the confidence to carry it off and so we got 'Love Is Not Enough' from this year's 'Diamond In The Firepit' and again, the Firefest audience lapped it up; the auditorium looked pretty full which proved Brother Firetribe were indeed a big draw.

The band effortlessly strode the boards and stroked the smooth flowing melodies of 'Midnite Queen' and 'Trail Of Tears' (another newie) across the audience in waves of fabulous Scandinavian artistry with Heino, who sported a virgin white Tee and waistcoat, enabling 'I'm On Fire' to be presented so aptly to the enraptured crowd. 'Wildest Dreams' saw the crowd chant in hearty fashion and when the song came to its sumptuous end, they started to stomp on the floor boards in a wild demonstration of utter delight.

The fabulous groove of Sammy Hagar's 'Winner Takes It All' (from the movie 'Over The Top' which they've included on '...Firepit') was followed again by another two from that album, 'Hanging By A Thread' and the new single 'For Better Or For Worse'.

Perhaps the biggest cheer of the whole performance was when the band launched into 'Heart Full Of Fire', originally scored by Heino for his own voice but it ended up with the fabulous Anette Olzon dueting on the album. Of course, no Olzon tonight, and not even Issa Oversveen (who was actually in attendance), but that barely mattered at the end of the day. They went out in a blaze of glory with the crowd anthem 'I Am Rock' which put the icing on this considerable Scandinavian cake! (CB)

Set-list: One Single Breath / Runaways / Love Is Not Enough / Midnite Queen / Trail Of Tears / I'm On Fire / Wildest Dreams / Winner Takes It All / Hanging By A Thread / For Better Or For Worse / Heart Full Of Fire / I Am Rock

Making a welcome return to Firefest after rave reviews last time out, Toronto Melodic Hard Rockers **CONEY HATCH** wasted no time promoting their recent 'Four' album as they bounded onto the stage with the sub-AC/DC riff of its lead-off track 'Blown Away'. Each member smiled from ear to ear, there was no denying the fact that singer/guitarist Carl Dixon was happy to be back on this stage alongside drummer Dave Ketchum and bassist/singer Andy Curran, and even though original guitarist Steve Shelski wasn't there, Curran's former Soho 69 band-mate Michael Borkosky filled his role effortlessly.

Curran took over the vocals for the rhythmic 'Stand Up' and he spat out the song with his trademark rasp, before he handed the vocals back to Dixon for three classic tracks: the lively 'Don't Say Make Me', a thumping 'This Ain't Love' (strangely absent on their previous visit!) and a simply wonderful version of 'She's Gone', complete with over a thousand extra backing singers. It's perhaps a testament to the affection shown towards the Canadians that they could get away with playing four new songs in a row, their version of The Angels' 'Marseilles' led into Curran's gritty 'Boys Club', whilst the no-nonsense pair of 'Down And Dirty' and 'Connected' showed what a grower the 'Four' album was with their instantly memorable choruses.

With the new album well and truly plugged it was back onto more familiar ground for the remainder of the set. First up was Dixon's glorious 'Hey Operator' followed by Curran's quirky 'Fallen Angel', both dispatched with big grins from the two front-men and some effective backing vocals from the confident Borkosky who began to look like he was really enjoying himself. The simple AOR of 'Girl From Last Night's Dream' was another fan favourite which was given extra impetus by the Firefest choir; its tuneful chorus was ideal for singing along to.

One of their oldest songs, the iconic 'Monkey Bars', showed what variety Coney Hatch have in their arsenal with Curran's humourous lyrics while Borkosky nailed the off-kilter guitar solo (stolen from an old jazz classic by original guitarist Steve Shelski). There was only one way to finish the set and that was with the opening track from the debut album, the classic riff to 'Devil's Deck'

started a fresh wave of pandemonium and sealed a second victorious Firefest appearance from one of Canada's greatest acts. (PA)

Set-list: Blown Away / Stand Up / Don't Say Make Me / This Ain't Love / She's Gone / Marseilles / Boys Club / Down And Dirty / Connected / Hey Operator / Fallen Angel / Girl From Last Night's Dream / Monkey Bars / Devil's Deck

Now I have to say I had a little trepidation about seeing **AUTOGRAPH**. Considering they were a band that evolved out of what was originally a vehicle for front-man Steve Plunkett, I was concerned that minus Plunkett it might whiff of karaoke. Also, they were squeezed in between Coney Hatch and headliners Danger Danger who had both previously proved themselves crowd pleasers on the Firefest stage. Such concerns were fortunately unwarranted; from the off, Autograph were worthy of their billing. Original members from the glory days, bass player Randy Rand and Steve Lynch, who made his fret-board wizardry look rather easy, showed no signs of diminished talents, although both men had obviously invested heavily in black hair dye prior to the gig! Newest recruit, drummer Marc Wielend, had the youthful energy to bang out their jungle beat.

What really won over the crowd though, was new front-man Simon Daniels who proved to be something of a revelation. He had a strong voice and didn't need to do an impression of Plunkett to make the songs work, plus he also had bags of charisma. Maybe it was just me but from where I was standing, he looked a bit like a butch Tawny Kitaen (!). He had that L.A. showbiz charm that got the crowd singing along and he supplied a few laughs along the way too; his funniest line being, "there are people from every planet here and we're from planet of the apes" which was kind of true as they did have a passing resemblance if you squinted in a certain way. Opening with 'The Deep End' a line like "I'm goin' down on a sinkin' boat" could have been tragically prophetic if they weren't able to deliver, but deliver they did and in some style.

While some lamented the lack of keyboards, personally I didn't miss them. Daniels added extra oomph on guitar and what you got was prime late-1980's Pop Metal: big flashy riffs and guitar shenanigans married to huge bubblegum hooks. This was never cerebral music, it's pure party music that brings out your inner adolescent. Even if sections of the crowd hadn't known the songs before today, they were able to sing along to them by the end of the first chorus, so catchy were the hooks. 'Dance All Night' got the tushie shaking, 'Loud and Clear' proved heavier live and 'Bad Boy' left you with a naughty feeling. 'Blondes In Black Cars' and 'When the Sun Goes Down' came at you with each chorus catchier than the last. Daniels alluded to the fact that someone had a lack of self-esteem on songs like 'My Girlfriend's Boyfriend Isn't Me' and 'She Never Looked That Good For Me'; who knew if this was a gentle jibe at Plunkett or not. 'Cloud 10' was, of course, heavenly as it mixed muscle and melody to great effect. Lynch's two-handed, fret-board tapping solo must have impressed any budding guitarists watching. 'Crazy World' got squeezed in last minute as the penultimate song, before their set finished with the only song it could have been; the classic 'Turn Up The Radio'.

I'm sure a few in the crowd who might not have been present for Autograph first time round would never have guessed that Daniels had only been in the band since last year. He was definitely a high point and a pleasant surprise. Now let's get this line-up in a recording studio for a new record pronto. (DJ)

Set-list: Deep End / Dance All Night / Loud And Clear / Bad Boy / Blondes In Black Cars / When The Sun Goes Down / All I'm Gonna Take / Send Her To Me / Cloud 10 / My Girlfriend's Boyfriend Isn't Me / She Never Looked That Good For Me / Crazy World / Turn Up The Radio

So the time had come; the final band of the final day of the final Firefest and what a perfect way to finish the party – the original line-up of **DANGER DANGER** on stage for the first time in over twenty years and what an awesome show it was. For those fans like myself, who prefer the first two albums compared to the Paul Laine fronted era, this was musical Nirvana. Eight songs from the debut, six from 'Screw It', solitary tracks from 'Cockroach' and 'Down And Dirty Live' and a couple of covers combined to make this possibly the best D2 show EVER! They have played Firefest several times but this was the first time with a keyboard player and Kasey Smith filled those spaces with consummate professionalism, especially when he and Ted Poley performed an exquisite version of 'One Step From Paradise' as a duo. As for Andy Timmons, what a monster on guitar he was as he segued from a heart-felt musical dedication to Jack Bruce to shredding away on 'Groove Or Die' – a master at work who added power and dexterity to every song. Poley remains the quintessential front-man and he was always smiling and always getting the audience involved, especially during his two walkabouts into the crowd, never missing a note.

'Goin' Goin' Gone' from 'Cockroach' was a surprise inclusion, given that Smith and Timmons never played on that album, but their limited rehearsal time didn't show as the band didn't miss a beat and the crowd went naturally wild!

The band ended with the usual bruising one-two combination of 'Monkey Business' and 'Naughty Naughty' before they pulled out a master-stroke. As Bruno Ravel announced, what better way to end the final show of the most acclaimed Melodic Rock festival than with the best known AOR song, and as the opening strains of Journey's 'Don't Stop Believin'' roared out the speakers, the Firefest crew joined the band on stage, along with several other familiar faces, for the most fitting end to the most famous AOR festival.

For me personally, that was my first time ever on the Firefest stage, and looking out into that sea of happy and exuberant faces there was a mixture of pride in what we had managed to bring together, along with sadness that this was the end. Ravel joked with Kieran Dargen on stage that this "couldn't be the last Firefest" but as our Irish friend took the mic for his final speech, he made it clear that this was, indeed, the end – "Firefest has left the building" but what truly wonderful and unbelievable moments have been created here over the past ten years, along with friendships from every corner of the world. Firefest may have ended, but the memories will remain for a life-time. (BM)

Set-list: Crazy Nites / Rock America / Turn It On / Beat The Bullet / Don't Walk Away / (Keyboard solo) / One Step From Paradise / Boys Will Be Boys / Feels Like Love / Theme For An Imaginary Western (Mountain cover) / Groove Or Die / Goin' Goin' Gone / Don't Blame It On Love / Bang Bang / I Still Think About You / Monkey Business / Encore – Naughty Naughty / Don't Stop Believin'

A FINAL WORD FROM OUR HOST...

And so what can be said after ten years and a hundred and fifty-ish bands? The answer – not a lot really. Firefest came, saw and whilst it may not have conquered, it certainly has made a difference; a difference to the perception of Melodic Hard Rock and AOR as perceived by almost everyone outside the firmly established circle. Seeing bands reform, record new albums, tour and some even graduate to Download and Sweden Rock stages has proved that good music does not need to be current, hip or trendy – it simply needs to be good. Firefest has played its part in helping some bands to make that decision to do it again; to others that people actually still care and above all that there is an audience for this music. Certainly it's not as healthy as it once was, but then again you could say that about almost any style of music outside the current chart bands or long established top class acts. Playing the Firefest stage was an honour for many bands, and rightly so, because the fans made it "the" place to play. It was a focal point, an event, a meeting place and above all a place that like-minded fans could call "home", albeit for one weekend a year.

Firefest was for the fans, by the fans and within that was the key. A lot of effort was put in to making each show an event with never before seen bands, reformed bands, new bands… and all of them chosen by fans for fans knowing that this line-up was killer. I hope we have left a positive mark and perhaps sometime in the future we will see you all again, but for now, with the memories of the last ten years still pretty fresh, it was a hell of a ride. To those that said we were mad, insane, it would never work, no one will come – we built it and they came. The key once again, a show being run by fans for fans, with everything else outside the line-up secondary. The only thing that was important was the bands on each day and the opportunity to actually see some of these AOR "legends" in action.

Many shows have cropped up during the last ten years. Some have fallen flat on their face without a note of music being played but we, and you, were there through it all, armed with photos, videos and autographs to prove the last ten years wasn't a dream… it actually happened. Take a bow you crazy lot, you deserve it; you are the true stars of Firefest.

Firefest: often rivalled, never equalled!

Kieran Dargan

FIRIN' ON ALL SIX!

VIRGIL AND THE ACCELERATORS
London: The Borderline
29 September 2014

A capacity crowd arrived to witness the release party for Virgil And The Accelerators new album 'Army Of Three', with a front-man that some are calling "the best Rock and Blues guitarist since Joe Bonamassa".

They took the roof off immediately with first track 'Take Me Higher' where Virgil McMahon threw all kinds of shapes as he blasted out sweet-but-killer guitar solos. On bass, Jack Alexander Timmis, with Virgil's brother Gabriel on drums, provided the super-tight rhythm section that locked-in effortlessly together and allowed McMahon free reign to take his guitar work in any direction he saw fit. '88' was a prime example, as the guys extended the song into a jam of The Rolling Stones 'Miss You'. McMahon mimicked Jagger's vocals with uncanny accuracy as he continued to play some mean guitar.

My personnel favourite from the new release, 'Through The Night', was a granite-hard slab of Melodic Blues Rock, with a super-catchy chorus that had much of the audience singing along.

Despite a somewhat over indulgent guitar solo during 'Low Down And Dirty', you could not help but be impressed by McMahon's showmanship; his interaction with the audience reminded me of such legendary players as Pat Travers and the late Rory Gallagher. The set ended with a Jimi Hendrix cover which could have been described as somewhat "predictable", but the execution was respectful and equally dynamic.

It's clear that the new album is a great piece of work, but nothing could have prepared the evening's audience for such a level of showmanship on stage.

Ray Paul

MOSTLY AUTUMN
St. Helens: Citadel
03 October 2014

It seems Mostly Autumn's visit to the intimate Citadel venue has now become an annual event; a bonus for me because it is only a five minute car journey away. As soon as I learned the band would be playing the excellent new release, 'Dressed In Voices', in its entirety, my attendance was something of a no-brainer.

The first set of the evening is made up of classic MA tracks, leaning ever so slightly towards the material created since Livvy Sparnenn-Josh became a permanent member of the band. The current line-up sees Anne-Marie Helder back playing flute and keyboards and also sees Chris Johnson return to the fold playing rhythm guitar in place of the recently departed Liam Davison. Alex Cromerty is the latest in a long line of drummers and if his performance tonight was anything to go by, it would be good to see him there for a while as he is quite a powerhouse and I was surprised his kit was still in one piece at the close. Due to playing a full sixty-five minute album, this left little time for older favourites so the likes of 'Mother Nature' and 'Passengers' (often set staples) had to be dropped. Early highlights included the poignant 'The Rain Song', a showcase for Sparnenn-Josh's unbelievably passionate vocals and Iain Jennings emotional accompaniment on the piano whilst 'The Last Climb' allowed Helder to take centre stage during a lengthy flute solo; the song came to a close with some fiery six-string action from Bryan Josh. 'Questioning Eyes' gave me goose-bumps and it was difficult not to be moved by Sparnenn-Josh's heartfelt singing.

During some of the more sombre passages of the '…Voices' second set you could have heard a pin drop, which emphasised just how intense the material is. The harrowing subject matter (the taking of someone's life and its consequences) was brought to life with the aid of several projected back-drops, though they never detracted from the actual music; it was reminiscent of Pink Floyd in some ways though I'm aware those comparisons have been made several times in the past. Sparnenn-Josh and Jennings played the biggest parts but the whole band put everything they had into the show and it was quite a draining experience… in a good way of course. The likes of 'First Day At School', 'The House On The Hill', 'The Last Day' and 'Dressed In Voices' resonated long after the show ended and I'm sure at some point the show will make a great DVD. Everything came to a close with 'Heroes' and 'Tonight' and two and a half hours had disappeared in the blink of an almost moist eye.

If you are a fan of Mostly Autumn and are yet to experience 'Dressed In Voices' played live, then you really are missing out on something and it is a testament to the strength of this album that some of the more recognised songs from the band's back catalogue are not missed at all.

Dave Bott

KOBRA AND THE LOTUS,
DENDERA, DEADHEAD
Southampton: The Joiners
06 October 2014

My appreciation of Kobra And The Lotus is fairly well recognised having been a highly vocal supporter since I first came across them a couple of years back. I was privileged to have the opportunity to attend two shows this tour (Southampton and London) and opted to review the first, a decision made easier by the inclusion of another act I rate highly in Dendera. Opening tonight was a youthful looking four-piece called Death Head.

DH served up six tracks of furious Thrash Metal very much in the style of early Metallica; indeed vocalist Sam Gilliland confirmed that they were "a Metallica tribute band that plays no actual Metallica songs". The likes of 'Terminator', 'Fatally Frantic' and closer 'Dial Up The Dead' were all built upon frantic Thrash progressions which featured some solid axe work and solos but occasionally left Gilliland somewhat buried under the onslaught. Whilst it was a competent performance, it wasn't one that left a lasting impression on me if I'm honest.

Dendera kicked off their set with an almighty roar from vocalist Ashley Edison before the frantic double drums and guitars of 'The Killing Floor' erupted. They swiftly followed this with a new track 'High Tide' which had a chunky riff and a nice gallop to the chorus; I had to laugh when Edison went to "air guitar" with one of the other members only for them to simply walk away. The riffs during 'For Vengeance' were thicker than a slab of concrete whilst Edison's vocals soared round the room. Dendera closed out with my two favourite tracks in 'Senlac Hill' and 'Bridges Will Burn'. Both were performed with real vigour and Edison encouraged the now filling venue to get involved; the band looked like they were having a real ball (as they always do) with plenty of movement and these two songs received a large applause as did Dendera for their set as a whole. I have yet to see anything other than a first class show from these guys and tonight was no exception.

After the required break, KATL came out and fired straight into their new album title track and one of my songs of the year in 'High Priestess'. Kobra Paige wailed away, especially in the chorus, as the rest of the band provided a thumping musical foundation. There was no respite as they swiftly moved into 'Nayana' where Paige was all over the stage engaging everyone across the front. 'Battle Of Wraith' saw the twin leads fire together in unison, the drums crashed away and the solos were rampant. But to be honest the bass was too heavy at times and it continued to be so during 'Hold On'. This was remedied by the time 'Warhorse' arrived where the main riff sounded excellent and Paige delivered some spectacular wails, especially before the solo. This preceded another of the tonight's top songs in 'Soldier'; the softer riff sailed round the room and Paige gave the crowd plenty of encouragement to join in during the bridge.

It was then time to return to the earlier self-titled release with 'Welcome To My Funeral'; there was some excellent twin guitar work to open before the axe men churned and thundered away during the verse. The band followed this up with a three song segment from their new album (my "2014 Album Of The Year"); these consisted of a lively rendition of 'Visionary', then 'Lost In The Shadows' with the main set being closed out with another of the evening's highlights in 'I Am, I Am'.

The encore, as it were given there wasn't much of a break, consisted of two more selections. Firstly my favourite from the new album ('Heartbeat') which was played as good as I could have hoped for before the whole night was bought to its finale with the rampant '50 Shades Of Evil'. These final two selections were (without doubt) my personal favourites from the whole show and KATL were rewarded with a large applause at the end. As always, it was great to see the band mingle with the crowd afterwards, as they always do

Despite the set being a little bass heavy in places, KATL still put on a top drawer performance tonight, one that was full of power, fury and passion and with each passing tour they seem to get better. I for one can't wait to see more live dates announced and experience Kobra And The Lotus once again.

Dave Scott

SKILLET
Wolverhampton: Wulfrun Hall
13 October 2014

Skillet, or to be precise Atlantic Records, thought that the time was ripe for Skillet to get a grip in Europe. An undiscovered popularity as a result of supporting Nickelback in Europe last year and a change in music climate back home in the States has meant that record sales needed pushing in pastures new; hence a European tour with Skillet taking in four dates on U.K. soil. Indeed, this was Skillet's first ever headlining tour in Europe; quite amazing for a band that's been going for nearly twenty years.

Fronted by possibly Rocks most amiable front-man John Cooper (interview to be found elsewhere in these pages) and with a reputation as one of the finest live bands around, it was high time that the band graced the U.K.

Playing for a little over an hour and a half, Skillet ripped through an energetic set. They opened with the bombastic 'Whispers In The Dark', resplendent with cello and violin accompaniment. Cooper and his band continued to treat the crowd to most of the fan favourites from 'Comatose' including 'The Last Night', 'Better Than Drugs' and a scintillating acoustic performance of 'Yours To Hold' where the fantastic Jen Ledger abandoned her drum kit to join Cooper front stage for a memorable duet.

Other welcome surprises arrived courtesy of four songs lifted from the 'Collide' album, including a rabble-rousing version of 'Saviour' and the ultra-aggressive 'Forsaken' which pleased the hardcore "Pan heads" contingent in the crowd. Other highlights included a thunderous version of 'Sick Of It' from the latest album 'Rise' and a brilliant encore of 'Rebirthing' introduced entertainingly with a blinding performance from the two man violin and cello orchestra.

The turn-out for a Monday was excellent and those who had taken the trouble to venture out on a rainy October night were rewarded with a performance that confirmed that Skillet really are something special; oh and they're coming back very soon.

Mike Newdeck

THE SIRENS
London: The Garage
16 October 2014

As a recognised Female-Fronted Metal obsessive, this was one live show that I simply couldn't miss. For those who unaware, The Sirens is a series of shows across Europe that features Liv Kristine (Theatre Of Tragedy, Leaves' Eyes), Anneke van Giersbergen (The Gathering) and Kari Rueslatten (The 3rd And The Mortal) performing together. It presented a unique opportunity to see the "founding ladies" of the genre I adore so much performing together.

It may come as a shock to some that there was no support act for the show but given the potential material that was available between these three artists, it made sense to me. What did genuinely surprised even me was the fact that right from the first track, 'Treat Me Like A Lady' (from van Giersbergen), all three appeared on stage together. They all took turns with various lines and all looked to be really enjoying themselves as they sang and boogied away.

The stage was then left to Kristine and van Giersbergen to perform the title track from Kristine's latest solo release 'Vervain', musically the sound was superb and both singers were crystal clear. Each singer then took a solo spot with van Giersbergen performing 'Saturnine' (The Gathering), Rueslatten one of her own compositions 'Exile' and Kristine with 'Venus' (Theatre Of Tragedy).

And that is basically how the rest of the show progressed; in all a further fifteen compositions followed those mentioned above, all performed with various combinations of solo and multiple singers. Due to space restrictions, it isn't possible to include every song and combination through the evening.

My personal highlights were 'Human Jungle' from van Giersbergen's last solo album 'Drive' which was performed by her alone; it's a fairly epic album track and the live rendition that was as good as you could have wished for. Another recent song that was included was 'Love Decay' (from Kristine's 'Vervain') which was performed by Kristine and van Giersbergen; the guitars were deep and Gothic as the leading ladies sang and grinned away. This was swiftly followed by 'Autopoema' which was a more relaxed song with some deep bass and some quality vocals from Rueslatten who performed it alone.

As well as songs from their various careers and acts, the three singers also combined to write and record two new songs for the tour that they then performed together much to the delight of the crowd. The first appeared about two thirds into the show entitled 'Embracing The Seasons' with the second, 'Sisters Of The Earth' selected to close out the show in style.

This evening was every bit as good as I had hoped for and it was truly a privilege to see three "pioneers" (of the genre I adore so much) not only in the same evening, but performing together on stage; it was a unique evening that will live in the memory.

Dave Scott

HOUSTON, THE SPIN, BIG TIME
London: Camden, The Barfly
16 October 2014

A Swedish triple bill – sounds good to me! So off we went to London for Houston, The Spin and Big Time at The Barfly in Camden. Not a massive venue, but considering there were several other shows on that night which would've impacted on this one, the guys didn't do too badly with a reasonable crowd who made up for any shortfall in numbers by their sheer enthusiasm.

The night started with relative newcomers Big Time. They are young, with more hair than a barber's floor and talent by the bucket load. They have a 1980's vibe – not that that's a bad thing – and played like they knew they were born in the wrong decade, but loving it anyway! Singer Mike Palace was a brilliant front-man and vocalist and guitarist Rick Digorio was all over the fret-board for the whole show. BT finished their incredibly short set of twenty-five minutes with Dio's 'We're Stars' and it showed that they were just that.

Next up were The Spin whose extensive experience of playing in the Home Counties, since relocating to the U.K. a year ago, has stood them in good stead. They have a more modern, up to date sound but still have the Swedish magical ingredient which makes AOR fans go weak at the knees.

Houston have only just released their second album, but have undergone numerous band changes since their inception by the now ex-members Freddie Allen and producer Ricky Delin. The line-up, still fronted by Hank Erix, is now far more of a band in looks and in sound. It was interesting to hear how they sounded now compared to past tours where Erix struggled a lot of the time with his delivery. He really seemed to have grown up and worked hard to get to this point and his faultless delivery was a joy. A guest appearance from Mia Klosse on 'Truth Slips' was an added bonus, but all in all it was a great – if short (less than fifty minutes) set.

They look far more like a band now and I think that their upcoming show at HRH AOR next March will be the ultimate test.

Sue Ashcroft

MR BIG
London: Camden, Koko Club
17 October 2014

I had been looking forward to the Mr Big show, especially since the announcement that drummer Pat Torpey had been diagnosed with Parkinson's disease. I wondered how that would affect the overall performance… in fact, would he be able to play at all?

From the first note of 'Gotta Love The Ride', it was obvious this was going to be a special night. Drummer Matt Starr was on the main kit for the first three songs, only he was on the stage with the other three band members. From the fourth track, Torpey was back! Albeit on a small kit at the side of the drum riser and he obviously struggled in parts, where he played along on the tambourine, but there he was – he smiled and sang along.

As the set progressed, the band played several more tracks from the new album '...The Stories We

Could Tell', interspersed with the usual fan favourites, as expected, and to a rapturous reception.

Billy Sheehan and Paul Gilbert have always worked well together on stage and tonight they played off against each other and of course the obligatory 'Drill Song' with Eric Martin on tool delivery (ooer!).

Martin has stopped pushing his vocals to the limits now, but instead he stayed within his range, and whilst this may be seen as a step back, on the contrary, he looked and sounded better than ever with his cheeky grin and crowd interaction as infectious as it was cute.

For the closing encore, the band swapped instruments and blasted us with the Judas Priest classic 'Living After Midnight', made all the more special by the fact that Torpey took the lead vocal. What an amazing performance; he is living proof that my mantra of "Carpe fuckin' Diem" is correct!

Sue Ashcroft

BERNIE TORME,
THE BROKEN CHORDS, AZIZ
Manchester: Academy 3
30 October 2014

Bernie Torme has been a top guitarist for more years than some of us would care to remember. From the Punk days of the seventies, he stood out enough to play with Ian Gillan and Ozzy Osbourne in the eighties. Numerous solo projects and collaborations have only enhanced his reputation, with those in the know, as a Rock guitarist with a pretty unique style. Following three successful albums with former Gillan cohort John McCoy in GMT, Torme's first solo album in fourteen years ('Flowers And Dirt') has been very positively received and it's an absolute pleasure to see him taking it on the road.

First up tonight is Aziz, a two piece led by former Stone Roses and Simply Red guitarist Aziz Ibrahim. We got a short instrumental set that combined Asian Tabla rhythms and Psychedelic distorted guitar in an "Asian Blues frenzy". It was entertaining enough, but personally they wouldn't hold my attention for any longer than the thirty minute set offered. The Broken Chords are a grooving, Bluesy Rock and Roll trio packed with personality. It's not meant as a slur on the music, but the enthusiasm and energy they showed on stage is just as important in a captivating performance. It was impossible to watch without a smile as their infectious passion shone through. If they can capture that in the studio, we're going to have a top album on our hands (hopefully) sometime soon.

With long-time cohort Chris Heilmann and Ian Harris, Torme has a band that exudes quality and, as ever, makes one hell of a noise for a three piece. Live favourite 'Wild West' opened up the set with its Hard Rocking rhythm, packed full of his trademark guitar tones and a lead that got the air guitar fingers twitching throughout the audience. With '...Dirt' gaining so much positive noise there was a selection of new tracks on show such as 'Blood Run Cold', 'Partytown' and 'Lockjaw', mingled in with a bit of GMT ('Bullet In The Brain', 'Rocky Road') along with plenty of solo material. Despite a smallish crowd, the band certainly delivered with Torme handling all vocals as well as his inimitable guitar work; the rhythm and lead work intertwined effortlessly making the old Strat shriek and whine at will. Heilmann and Harris made the most effective rhythm team which allowed Torme to weave his own magic without disruption to the tone of each song; drummer Harris even managed to throw in an entertaining drum solo.

The main set closed with an upbeat 'Can't Beat Rock 'N' Roll' followed by two covers from Torme's Gillan days, 'Trouble' and 'New Orleans'. The night was rounded off with another old favourite 'Bony Moronie' and the chance for Craig Isherwood, one of the pledgers for '... Dirt' to be allowed to join the band on stage for 'No Easy Way'. It was a nice touch that summed up Torme and the band as good guys who really do value their supporters. This was backed up by the whole band chatting and signing autographs long after the venue security were getting edgy over curfew times.

'Star' may have been one of the standout songs but with Bernie Torme being one of the few Rock guitarists around that genuinely does have a unique and distinctive sound; he should be one of the brightest stars around. But a more down to earth guy you couldn't wish to meet and on this sort of performance he should continue to shine for a good while yet.

Ian Parry

STEVE HACKETT, MOSTLY AUTUMN
London: Hammersmith Apollo
01 November 2014

The irony of Steve Hackett's third (yes, third) iteration of the Genesis Revisited Tour was delicious as it closely followed the appalling Genesis Documentary shown on BBC2 which all but airbrushed Hackett and the early albums out of the band's history. Tony Banks may wish to disown that era, but on the evidence of hundreds of gigs across the globe and numerous standing ovations, there's still a huge audience out there for the music; Hackett along with his trusty cohorts (Nad Sylvan, Roger King, Gary O'Toole, Rob Townsend and on this section of the tour, Nick Beggs) certainly gave the fans what they wanted. His little asides about keeping the flame alive found a very willing audience.

The set-list differed from the previous legs with 'Squonk' and 'The Knife' being notable inclusions and much of the gentler material being omitted. The only surprise being that there was nothing from the 'Wind And Wuthering' album.

This time around they arrived on stage to some nice intro music before they dived into the first crowd-pleaser of the night with 'Dance On A Volcano' followed by the aforementioned 'Squonk'; boy, was it good to hear that live again?

The quality just kept on coming as the crowd gleefully and lustily joined in, at Hackett's invitation, with 'Dancing With The Moonlit Knight' while O'Toole was splendid as he took up lead vocal duties on 'Fly On A Windshield'. The power that emanated from the stage as that track drove into 'Broadway Melody Of 1974' was immense. We were then taken back to early Genesis with 'The Return Of The Giant Hogweed' and 'The Fountain Of Salmacis', both of which received huge roars of approval, as did 'The Musical Box'.

The only negative being when Hackett went into ad lib solo mode. Hackett is one of my guitar heroes but it's the fluid, melodic grace and beauty of the solos such as that in 'Firth Of Fifth' (again played exquisitely, despite guest Jakko Jakszyk getting the lyrics wrong) that tick the boxes, the unstructured attempts leave me cold. Hackett's brother John also joined the group to deliver the delightful flute section.

Another welcome inclusion followed in the form of 'Lilywhite Lilith' which preceded '...Knife', before the show concluded with the epic 'Supper's Ready'. Not that would sate the audience and a rambunctious 'Watcher Of The Skies' was topped by an equally powerful 'Slogans/Los Endos'; another triumph and apart from those solos, an almost perfect evening.

Support came in the form of Bryan Josh and Olivia Sparnenn-Josh doing Mostly Autumn in acoustic fashion; they showed that a good song survives being stripped back.

Gary Marshall

ASIA
London: Shepherds Bush Empire
03 November 2014

This was the last date of the U.K. tour for Asia, and my first time watching new guitarist Sam Coulson, who has replaced Steve Howe. The band took the stage at an unusually early hour of 7.30pm, which meant everyone scrambled for their seats. Asia kicked off with two classics, 'Sole Survivor' and 'Wildest Dreams', where the whole band produced a "radio-friendly" sheen.

Singer and bass guitarist John Wetton was dressed in white shirt with waistcoat and looked quite the English gentleman. Vocally, I felt this was the best I had heard him in many years and the addition of some keyboard backing vocals supplied by Geoffrey Downes really enhanced the chorus lines of the songs, they gave them the rich full sound of the original recordings.

The New album 'Gravitas' was represented by the title track and a rather awesome rendition of 'Valkyrie'. Drummer Carl Palmer was a joy to watch and gave a complete master-class for any drummer. He was sat behind his metallic drum kit, with two gongs behind him, and he owned 'Time Again' due to his percussive work that drove the song. There are very few drummers I will entertain a drum solo from with the exceptions of Palmer, as well as Neil Peart of Rush and any Kiss drummer due to spectacle alone!

New guitarist Coulson looked a like a floppy haired sixth-former who had grabbed the gig of a lifetime and although his playing is competent, he lacked the musical seniority and flair of his predecessor. To me, he looked out of place on the stage, to the point I almost forgot he was there!

'Voice Of America' was given the acoustic treatment, whilst 'The Smile Has Left Your Eyes' took on a more intimate approach, and Wetton, minus-bass, presented this in the style of a leading man in a theatrical production. It was nice to hear 'Don't Cry', and the addition of 'Go' to the set was a pleasant surprise. 'Only Time Will Tell' and a boisterous 'Heat Of The Moment' brought a wonderful evening of music to an end.

Asia really are a musical treasure, I would say this was probably the most diverse set the band has played for some years – and all the better for it!

Ray Paul

LACUNA COIL, MOTIONLESS IN WHITE
Manchester: Ritz
04 November 2014

This was my first gig at The Ritz in a long time. I'm usually stuck in the one of the Academy venues a mile further down the road, where it seems deodorant and soap has been banned for twenty years. First impressions of The Ritz are that the view of the stage is much better and that the sound has greater clarity. Unfortunately the very young audience, much like their older student brothers and sisters, has yet to discover the pleasure of feeling clean and smelling of nothing but sweat.

Judging by the t-shirts in the very long queue outside the venue it was clear that Motionless In White had a sizeable following. They were new to me and I had never heard any of their material. When the band appeared on the stage the room erupted, it was like a welcome given to returning heroes. The next sixty minutes however lasted far too long. For one thing, it was too loud and there was no discernible structure to the songs. The huge guitar, bass and drum sound drowned out the vocals and sampled elements performed by hooded keyboard player at the rear near the drum kit. Lead singer Chris Motionless seems to be a very popular figure but for the most part the whole thing came across as image over substance. A few songs had a decent vibe, such as 'A.M.E.R.I.C.A.', 'Dead As Fuck' and 'Devil's Night', but the likes of 'Immaculate Misconception', 'Abigail' and 'Break The Cycle' got lost in the noise.

Since Lacuna Coil last played in the U.K. there have been a number of changes in the line-up, for the first time in sixteen years. Drummer Cristiano "Criz" Mozzati and guitarist Cristiano Migliore have left the band, the drum-stool now being filled by former drum tech and, for a period of time ThisIsShe drummer, Ryan Blake Folden. Folden is quite a powerhouse so it seems the transition has been a relatively smooth one. The band have continued with just one guitarist and though it did mean a bit of power was lost, it was not that obvious in the main as LC have always relied on backing tapes to bolster the sound anyway. For this current tour they were also without original bass player Marco Coti Zelati, who is currently recovering well from minor surgery. His place has been taken by guitar tech Daniel and I have to confess that he did an admirable job and seemed to be relishing his chance in the spotlight.

Tonight LC were incredibly tight, Cristina Scabbia in particular was in great form. She never missed a note and had great energy. I have had my reservations about co-lead singer Andrea Ferro in the past but now I cannot imagine a show without him and though his vocals lack range, they act as a great contrast to those of Scabbia. From 'Trip The Darkness' through 'Intoxicated', 'To The Edge', 'Heaven's A Lie', 'Spellbound' and 'Die & Rise' there was no let up in the intensity. The main set closed with a cover of Depeche Mode's 'Enjoy The Silence' before an encore featuring 'Nothing Stands In Our Way' and 'Our Truth' brought the way too short set to a close.

Hopefully the Italian Goth/Metal outfit will return to the U.K. soon with a lower profile support act, so they have greater time to perform more songs.

Dave Bott

STEVE ROTHERY BAND, RANESTRANE
Manchester: Band On The Wall
06 November 2014

In footballing terms this is what you'd call a game of two halves – or possibly three? Those wise enough to have arrived early will have experienced a terrific opening set by Italian Prog Rockers RanestRane, whose keys player Ricardo Romano was onstage for the duration being a member too of the Steve Rothery quintet. They played a set based on material from their new 'Space Odyssey Part One' album and they did an impressive job accompanying the visuals that played out in the big screen. They call it a "cineconcerto" – quite an original concept, but with the combination of washes of keys and Massimo Pomo's cutting guitar plus the occasional vocal from drummer Daniele Pomo, their atmospheric material set the scene for the main course perfectly.

Having had the appetite truly whetted, it was a welcome fit for heroes for the popular founder member of Marillion, lauded guitarist Rothery and his band. Lined up alongside Romano stood extra guitarist Dave Foster, drummer Leon Parr and Yatim Halimi on bass who provided more than a suitable outfit for reproducing the whole of the recently released 'The Ghosts Of Pripyat' album. His first solo album proper, it gave Rothery a chance to deliver those sweetly melodic lead lines he's been doing for the past thirty odd years with Marillion.

From the gentle and slow build up of the atmospheric 'Morpheus', it introduced the band with a whisper rather than a bang, it was a more mellow opening that built into the first of an evening full of transcendent Rothery solos and gave a taster of what was to come in droves for the next two hours.

The set of instrumentals which make up 'Pripyat' were played straight through and displayed all the harmonious sensibilities Rothery brings to his day job which ranged from the intense rhythm and Arabic sounding influences of 'Kendris' (belted out in unison by the pair of guitars) to the climax of the title track which received what Foster called the loudest crowd reception he'd ever played had. And not just blind worship, it was truly deserved; the album was brought to magnificent life by an exceptional band and its exceptional leader and performed with an absolute enjoyment and pleasure. Impossible to pick a high point as the whole set was one big highlight, but maybe at a push, the soloing over the last four minutes of 'Old Man Of The Sea' was astounding at the least.

Following up such an inspirational album performance might have been a bit tricky, but for a second half, a thoroughly warmed up crowd got what many of them hoped for.

Dipping into the Marillion bag of tricks, it was almost a case of "I wonder what the fans would like to hear" and not getting it too far wrong. Songs from the early days, which you're highly unlikely to hear at a present day Marillion gig, plus a rare b-side in 'Cinderella Search' opened the second half with a bang. It was back to the early eighties with 'Chelsea Monday' from the Marillion debut plus there was the rabid intensity of 'Incubus' and 'Fugazi' from that difficult second album; vocalist Martin Jackubski (imported from the Stillmarillion tribute band) got it spot on with the loquacious lyrical content. It was definitely a move which satisfied everyone in the room, both on and off stage, with the slight retro feel to the material, the 'newest' of which being 1995's 'Afraid Of Sunlight'; Jackubski gave a great performance as he reached for the falsetto of the fragile closing lines. Of course, the choice reflected in particular the guitar parts which made Rothery famous and also gave the chance to indulge in some enthusiastic audience participation and to show their passion for Rothery's history. Not many would argue against this as a surprise late contender for gig of the year.

Mike Ainscoe

VEGA, NEWMAN
Bolton: The Railway Venue
06 November 2014

The onset of winter can be demoralising for many. The dark, dank days shroud us with fatigue and ennui, and Jack Frost sadistically pokes and prods us with his icy fingers, forcing us to scour the internet in search of warmer climes that we cannot really afford. However, all is not bleak; new releases continue, and the gigging season is still in full flow… so, with October's Firefest still fresh in our minds, (and certainly still battering down the doors of our immune systems), it was with huge anticipation that a sizeable gathering of Firefest regulars, artistes, and curious locals descended on the mercurial Railway Venue. For those uninitiated, I can only describe it as having your favourite bands play in your front- room, with your much-loved Auntie and Uncle as hosts. It may be a little out of the way, and it has a relatively small capacity, but it does have a huge heart – one that throbs to the beat of Rock 'n' Roll. Already this year, they have rolled out the red carpet for innumerable Melodic Rock bands, including: Lost Weekend, Eden's Curse, Rage Of Angels and Romeo's Daughter – so there is little doubt that the place continues to impress and entice both artists and punters alike.

But this night was all about two bands who will always be embroidered firmly and fondly within the Melodic Rock tapestry, and rightly so – Vega, with their unique marque of new-school Melodic Rock and Newman, who always deliver their expansive repertoire in a fresh and fervent manner. The lengthy (and utterly gratifying) period of social pleasantries within the venue suddenly relinquished to rapturous applause and enthusiastic banter when Steve Newman and his band made their unpretentious entrance.

Wasting little time, they launched into the frantic 'Some Kinda Wonderful' off their latest album 'Siren' – no great surprise really as co-writer Pete Newdeck was primed behind the drums looking ready for some kinda Rock 'n' Roll epiphany. This was the second of a four date mini-tour, so they took little time in getting up to speed and moved seamlessly, from album to album, validating their impressive back catalogue; the luscious 'Every Moment' and the tribal 'Primitive Soul' being the standouts. Steve Newman has always surrounded himself with accomplished and like-minded musicians; Paul Boyle on keys, David Bartlett on bass, and the charismatic Shaun Bessant on guitar each gave their all, and despite suffering from the infamous Firefest lurgy, Steve Newman continued regardless, only stopping occasionally to mop his fevered brow. 'If It's Love', 'Coming Home Tonight' (complete with audience participation) and 'Heaven Knows' began to

close the set, but there was still one more to come – Steve Newman strapped on his guitar and delivered his signature dish, 'One Step Closer', which almost lifted the roof off.

After a short break, Vega hit the stage with dynamism and purpose where they launched straight into a rousing three-song salvo of 'Stereo Messiah', 'What The Hell' and 'Into The Wild'. The place was soon bouncing, and the audience gorged on the energy transmitted from the stage. With three highly rated albums now under their belt, every Vega song that followed generated jubilation – let's face it, they could extract "yeah-yeah's" and "whoa-oh's" from even the most lethargic audience. Nick Workman was in captivating form, and flanked by Tom Martin on bass and Marcus Thurston's spellbinding guitar work, he mesmerised the crowd with his exuberant delivery and demeanour. If I were forced to single out further songs for special honours, they would have to be 'All Or Nothing', 'Headlights' and 'Wherever We Are' which were all driven on by sumptuous keys from James Martin, and not forgetting, Dan Chantrey on drums. Finishing with 'Hands In The Air' Vega proved yet again that they are the future of our beloved genre, and worthy 'Stereo Messiahs'!!

Dave Crompton

BILLY IDOL
Manchester: Apollo
10 November 2014

Sightings of Billy Idol have been pretty few and far between in the last few years. After a wait of twelve years, 2005's 'Devils Playground' was a Hard Rocking comeback album, so it's been a mere eight quiet years until 'Kings And Queens Of The Underground' and these few live dates were announced. Now 'Kings…' is a fine album, not quite as good in my own opinion as some of the reviews would suggest, so after all these years should there be any concern that he can still cut it live? The Idol audience still have the faith. If the Apollo wasn't sold out, it was pretty damn close as a packed house waited patiently. With the ubiquitous Steve Stevens alongside, any doubters should be hanging their heads in shame.

From the moment that the lights on stage and the crowd rose in unison to the opening of 'Postcards From The Past', this was a performance paced with all the brash confidence and bravado you'd expect, like we were back in the eighties and he'd never been away. There was the clenched fist, the lip curl, all predictable perhaps but an integral part of the show; a classic case of giving your audience exactly what they want and being proud of it. Rich, strong vocals haven't been dulled by those missing years with 'Can't Break Me Down' keeping the place Rocking and 'Dancing With Myself' as a long lost friend from the Generation X days.

Stevens is the perfect foil for Idol as has been proved time and time again. Flashy guitar, some fine solos and clearly a mutual admiration between the two. Idol has always had his lighter acoustic side too and after another Hard Rocking newie in 'Whiskey And Pills' the pace dropped a little for 'Sweet Sixteen' and 'Kings And Queens Of The Underground' itself. Idol donned his own guitar to good effect and after Stevens showcase solo, the shirt was off and they built towards the climatic ending of 'Ready, Steady, Go' and 'Rebel Yell'.

The encores consisted of (unsurprisingly) 'White Wedding' and 'Mony Mony' which completed a captivating performance of contemporary nostalgia if there is such a thing. The rest of the band ably supplied the base to work from, but let's be honest, the show was about Idol and Stevens, nothing more.

Personally, I'd love to have heard a few more of the Rockers from 'Devils Playground' but without doubt, the legend that is Billy Idol lived on in Manchester tonight. The only questions to be answered are why has it been so long and when is it going to happen again, as there's probably not a soul in the house that wouldn't come back for more; a triumphant return!

Ian Parry

VOLBEAT
Nottingham: Rock City
14 November 2014

I think it is fair to say that it has been an awful long time since I have seen so many people inside the Rock City. Those times that I remember where the crowd was as big as this was when I went to see the likes of Ozzy Osbourne, Slash and Extreme. Volbeat are clearly popular which is amazing when you think about it; who in their right mind would combine Metal, Pop, Punk and Country music and think they would get away with it?

Well, Michael Poulsen for one, he of the 1950's throwback look with his slicked back hair and his retro looking Gibson SG. I saw them play the main stage at Download in June and the second stage last year and I thought they were good then; but they were far better tonight which in part was probably down to the smaller and more intimate venue.

It was a relatively early start for Volbeat and they came on-stage shortly after eight with an intro tape of Motorhead's 'Born To Raise Hell' followed by a section of 'Doc Holiday' before they got to work with 'Hallelujah Goat', 'Guitar Gangsters And Cadillac Blood' and 'The Nameless One.' The crowd was with them from the off, and I got the feeling that Poulsen was slightly taken aback by the reception.

Also, now that ex-Anthrax guitarist Rob Caggiano is on lead guitar, there was a more focussed edge to the music; something that obviously pleased the out and out Metalheads. We got a complete career spanning set tonight with tracks from all of their albums which included 'Sad Man's Tongue', 'Lola Montez', 'Dead But Rising', 'The Mirror And The Ripper', 'The Hangman's Body Count' and crowd favourite 'Maybelline I Hofteholder.'

One thing that was very obvious was that the band really enjoyed themselves on stage, so much so that Poulsen actually jumped off it at one point and rode the hands to the rear of the hall and back again, with a simple quick comb of the hair on return before he continued (this is something he does frequently). His rapport with the audience was very good, as he encouraged them to join him in impersonating Elvis Presley (among other things) during the show.

I have to admit, if someone had told me to go and see a band that combined all those aforementioned ingredients, I would probably have thought they were on something and that it couldn't possibly work. I can't work it out and why but it definitely does. Anybody who has not yet seen or heard Volbeat should do so at least once, just to see how these differing genres of music can all be placed in the same pot and served back as a banquet.

Andy Brailsford

BLUES PILLS
London: The Dome, Tufnell Park
18 November 2014

This was the last date of the current Blues Pills U.K. tour before they hooked up with Rival Sons for further U.K. (support) slots; it is safe to say the band has tirelessly been working the live circuit since the release of their stunning debut album.

After an energetic set from support act The Vintage Caravan, BP took to the stage like home-coming heroes. England has really taken the band to their hearts and a good attendance was in show.

The Funked-up Rock of 'High Class Woman' kicked things off splendidly and it was clear that the band was still firing on all cylinders. Singer Elin Larsson commanded the stage – minus footwear – with infectious confidence as she shook her head to the music and danced like a witch on a full moon.

Guitarist Dorian Sorriaux has an intense, yet soulful style to his playing; his Les Paul guitar produced some scorching riffs during 'Little Sun' and beautiful melodies in 'Astraplane'. He never resorted to over the top poses instead he relied solely on his cool, self-assured guitar delivery.

New drummer Andre Kvarnstorm has fitted in perfectly and along with bass player Zack Anderson, the two sounded like a Rock 'n' Roll steam train, especially during '...Sun'.

Larsson's soulful voice makes her one of the most talked about female singers of the present time. Her vocals one minute sounded like a banshee (during 'Devil Man'), and then the next, a woman in the midst of tragedy (the beautiful 'No Hope Left For Me').

Tonight's performance saw the band reaching new musical heights in the live arena and with a new album already in the works and tours booked for the new year, Blues Pills are here to assure us Rock is anything but dead!

Ray Paul

BRYAN ADAMS
Sheffield: Motorpoint Arena
18 November 2014

Bryan Adams and his band strolled on to the Sheffield stage to what has to be said was a very subdued atmosphere that was not helped by him opening with a relatively unknown track 'Reckless'. A run through of the classic 'Reckless' album followed, with the audience finally coming to life during the ballad 'Heaven' (that actually saw co-writer Jim Vallance join the band on stage playing piano).

'Kids Wanna Rock' might be true, however, lots in attendance this evening had obviously forgotten how to! Not so the band, Mickey Curry (drums), Norm Fisher (bass), Gary Breitt (keyboards) and the inimitable Keith Scott (guitars) were all on fire; the sound was fantastic and Adams' voice was faultless throughout.

'It's Only Love' went down well but 'Long Gone' and 'Ain't Gonna Cry' seemed to be not that well known to most of the audience. 'Somebody' was a personal highlight but it was 'Summer Of 69' that eventually saw the whole of the arena on their feet. The 'Reckless' first half of the show was brought to a conclusion with an acoustic version of 'Let Me Down Easy'.

The intro to '(Everything I Do) I Do It For You' finally saw the crowd fully come out of their self-imposed hibernation. During 'If Ya Wanna Be Bad, Ya Gotta Be Good' Adams picked out a rather eye pleasing, young lady from the audience to shake her stuff.

Adams then invited the crowd to help sing-a-long with the classic 'Cuts Like A Knife'; I have to say that it is very refreshing for one of the elder statesman of Rock (fifty-five years old) not to be lazy and rely solely on the fans to do the singing. Another crowd favourite was 'Can't Stop This Thing We Started' as was the ballad 'Please Forgive Me'.

Adams gave a name-check to the co-writer of 'When You're Gone' by amusingly shouting out, 'Eliot (Kennedy), where are you, you fat fuck?" At the end of the song he apologised to Sheffield hometown boy, "Sorry for calling you fat Eliot!" to huge roars of laughter. '18 Til' I Die' and 'The Only Thing That Looks Good On Me Is You' were accompanied by a pair of woeful videos and brought the main set to a close.

The band left to a richly deserved, standing ovation and returned for a two number encore starting with 'You've Been A Friend To Me' and a great version of the Eddie Cochran classic 'C'mon Everybody'. His band then left, leaving Adams to finish off with three emotional, acoustic ballads; new song 'She Knows', the classic 'Straight From The Heart' and 'All For One'.

Thirty-five years down the line, Bryan Adams is still going strong. He may no longer Rock on his albums these days, however, put him on a stage in front of a live audience and he definitely still cuts the mustard.

Mark Donnelly

CROBOT

Interview by Ian Parry

Things have been moving fast for Pennsylvania's Crobot, signing to Wind Up Records with a UK and Europe distribution deal through Nuclear Blast has seen a high profile and almost universal praise for latest album 'Something Supernatural' Back home after their first visit to the UK supporting The Virgin Marys, vocalist Brandon Yeagley was happy to answer a few questions and talk about how things have progressed in the last six months or so.

"Signing with Wind-Up opened up a lot of opportunities and tools that we need to survive in the studio and on the road. They have really given us a ton of support and we couldn't be happier with our relationship with our labels," he explains. "Our team is a huge reason why we have obtained what we have thus far in our careers."

That includes the release of 'Something Supernatural'. Whilst four tracks were initially released earlier in the year as an EP the response is beyond expectations.

"All of this really is a big surprise. We are grateful that people enjoy the songs that we write. When we get into a room and jam, we just let it all happen. And, the fact that people are fans keeps us alive and able to do what we love to do and we will never forget that."

However it's on the road that Crobot really seem to come alive as Brandon explains.

"We were told multiple times by multiple people that we *need* to tour overseas. I guess we just have that kind of sound. The response when we finally did get to tour the UK could not have been any better though really. We were only there for a week, and it definitely was not enough time to fully engulf what the UK has to offer. What we did get is a taste of something great. We really felt at home at every city we visited."

Whilst Crobot do have a contemporary Hard Rocking sound, the early influences of Led Zeppelin and Sabbath are clearly there, which made the visit to England that bit special for the band.

"We all have different influences but are cut from the same cloth. We are all fanatics of Rock and grew up listening to the classics of the 60s on up, listening to whatever our parents listened to. Led Zeppelin, Black Sabbath, Hendrix, all of these bands were spoon fed to us. Also, there are a lot of really cool bands out there now like Graveyard, Clutch and Soundgarden that have a heavy influence on what we do.

"It was an incredible experience from start to finish. We actually got a chance to see some really cool things on our adventure over there. On our ride we stopped at Hadrian's Wall, which was a personal highlight of the trip. Seeing the fortitude first-hand was quite an experience. Sightseeing aside though, the music lovers are something special in the UK. They are all so passionate about our style especially and it is a real treat to witness that." And whilst the band would love to be back with some smaller headlining shows of their own, they are also realistically cautious about moving too quickly and the finances of touring overseas. "It would be awesome to be at that level, but it is probably smarter for us to do some support runs first; so more people can get a taste. We have some awesome news in store for next year in the Crobot nebula, especially overseas; so stay tuned!"

In their spare time off stage there's nothing more the band like to do than relax with a beer. And as seems to be becoming increasingly popular, Crobot even have their own brand in the making.

"We met a brew-master from Double Barley Brewing when we toured with Clutch at a show in Raleigh, North Carolina and he said he would be interested in brewing up a Crobot beer. Well, we took him up on the offer and talked about how we could make it happen. It is still in the stages of being brewed and released yet but it should be out very soon! By the way, it is pretty good! Surely it's a sign of your success if you can start asking for your own beer on your rider!"

But for now things are continuing to move at a hectic, but most enjoyable pace. There's no place for the day jobs any more as the Crobot vibe just seems to keep growing.

"It is definitely a full time job. We go out for a few months and are back for a few weeks, only to repeat the same cycle. It is kind of hard to find a boss that will be cool with that kind of schedule. Bishop is an amazing tattoo artist and he inks whenever we are home".

An American tour is set up for most of December, and looking further into 2015 things get even better for the band…

"We have a huge tour with Volbeat and Anthrax in the US and Canada that will be our first arena tour to date. We are extremely excited about that! We will be headed out to the Bahamas in February and we are sure we will be back overseas soon!"

Crobot are clearly a band on the march. Even since this conversation took place more dates have been announced that will see Crobot returning to these shores in February as part of a month long UK and Europe tour supporting Black Label Society. If you haven't discovered 'Something Supernatural' yet then it's well worth checking out, Check your diaries as Zakk Wylde and co had better watch out on tour as Crobot are not about to play second best to anyone.

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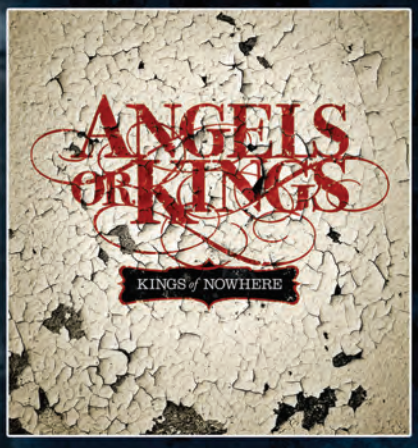

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